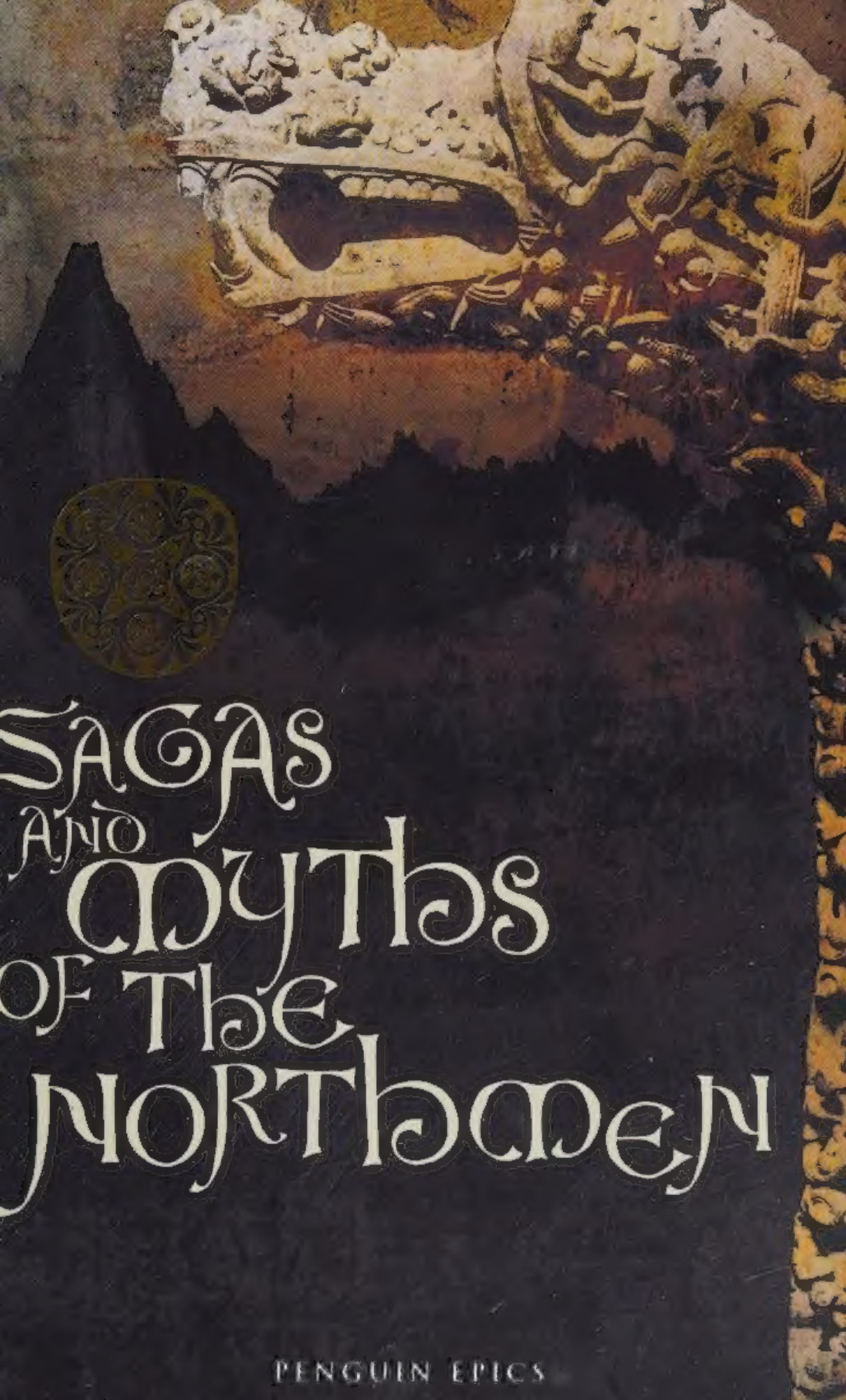
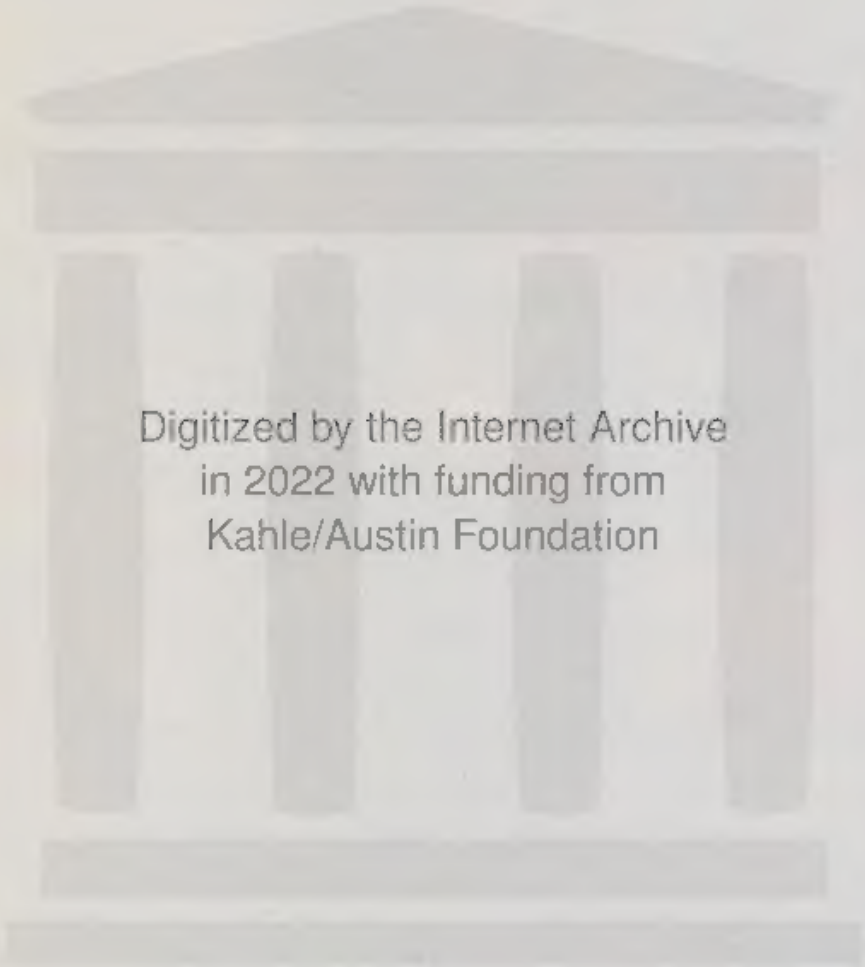


SAGAS AND MYTHS OF THE NORTHMEN

PENGUIN EPICS


THE SEA • SEA THE
SIEGFRIED'S MURDER
THE FALL OF JERUSALEM
Abduction Of Sita
GILGAMESH
PENGUIN EPICS

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Sagas and Myths of the Northmen

TRANSLATED BY JESSE BYOCK

PENGUIN EPICS

PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia
(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India
Penguin Group (NZ), cnr Airborne and Rosedale Roads, Albany,
Auckland 1310, New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue,
Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

www.penguin.com

The Saga of the Volsungs first published in Penguin Classics 1999
The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki first published in Penguin Classics 1998
The Prose Edda first published in Penguin Classics 2005
These extracts published in Penguin Books 2006

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Taken from the Penguin Classics editions of *The Saga of the Volsungs*, *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki* and *The Prose Edda*, translated by Jesse Byock

Typeset by Rowland Phototypesetting Ltd, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk
Printed in England by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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ISBN-13: 978-0-141-02641-1
ISBN-10: 0-141-02641-3

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Note

The Viking Age (*c.* AD 790 to 1100) was a time when Scandinavians sailed from their homelands exploring, conquering, trading and settling. They attacked the British Isles, terrified Europe and reached destinations as far away as Iceland, Greenland, North America, Constantinople and the Caliphate of Baghdad. Wherever the Northmen went, they brought with them their legends and myths, some older than the Viking Age itself. Among these were stories of the Norse gods, including Odin and Thor, as well as two great legendary cycles of tales about ancient heroes.

One of these cycles recounted the deeds of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer, the ancestor of the Norwegian royal house who acquired the magical ring of the dwarves and the cursed golden treasure lost under the waters of the Rhine. Sigurd's family, like that of his counterpart Siegfried in the German epic *The Nibelungenlied*, battled with King Atli, the historical Attila the Hun. The other legendary cycle was about Denmark's warrior king Hrolf Kraki, who like King Arthur in the Celtic lands, gathered around him champions. Hrolf's famous heroes fought berserkers and contested with Hrolf's half sister Skuld, the daughter of an elven woman. Foremost of Hrolf's champions was Bodvar Bjarki, the bear-warrior who

resembles Beowulf and whose father Bjorn was cursed by a witch to live as a bear by day but a man by night.

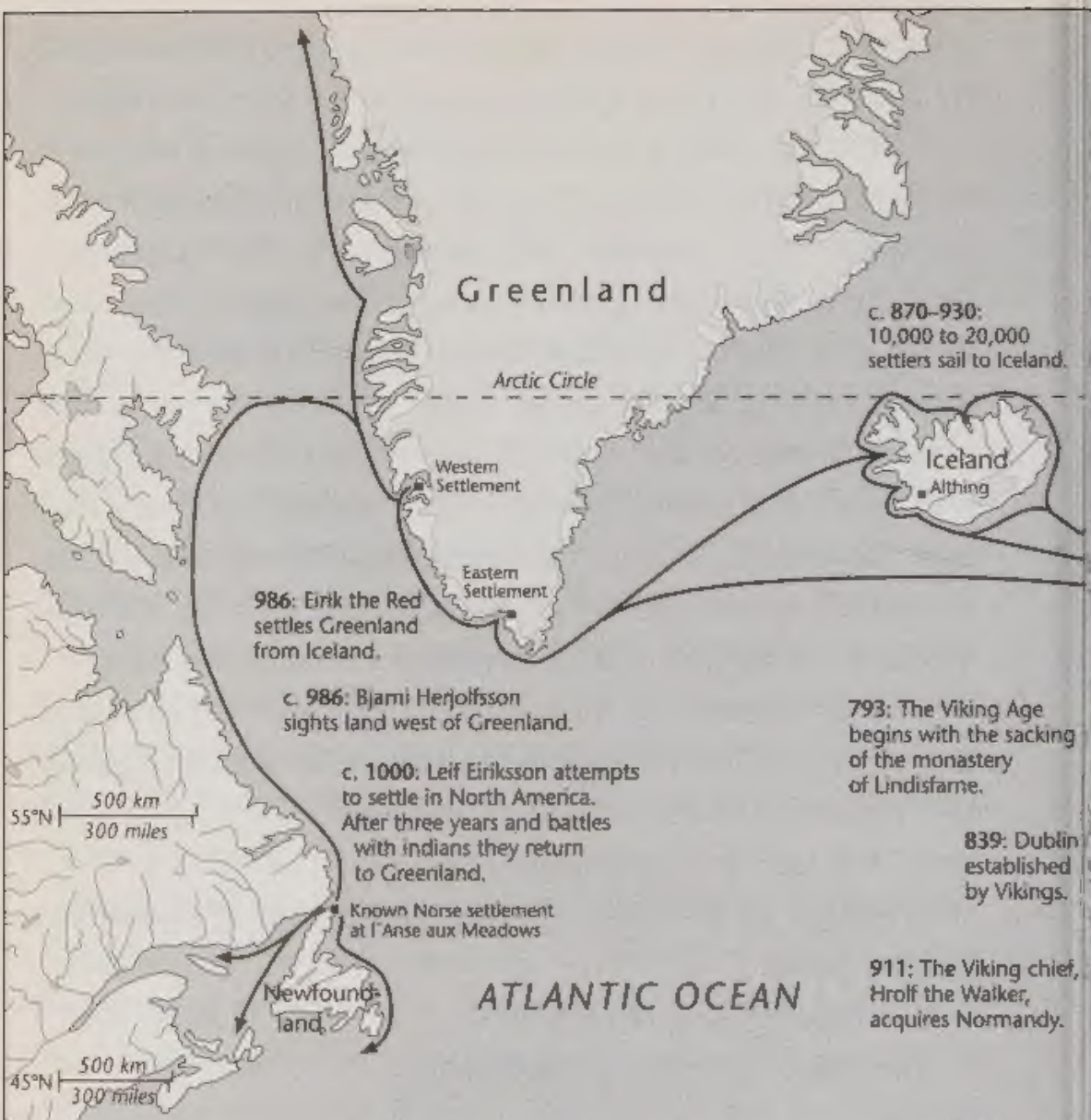
These legacies of ancient storytelling were brought to Iceland in the Viking era and preserved through oral memory until penned on vellum in the thirteenth century as *The Saga of the Volsungs*, *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki* and *The Prose Edda*. Among the best-known tales during Viking times, these sagas and myths have also played a significant role in the evolution of Western literature and culture, influencing modern popular fiction, historical, social and mythological understanding, as well as specific works of modern epic such as Richard Wagner's *Ring* and J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

The selections in this current book are translated directly from the Old Norse and serve as an initiation to the sagas and myths of the Northmen. They are drawn from the following Penguin Classics:

The Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer

The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki

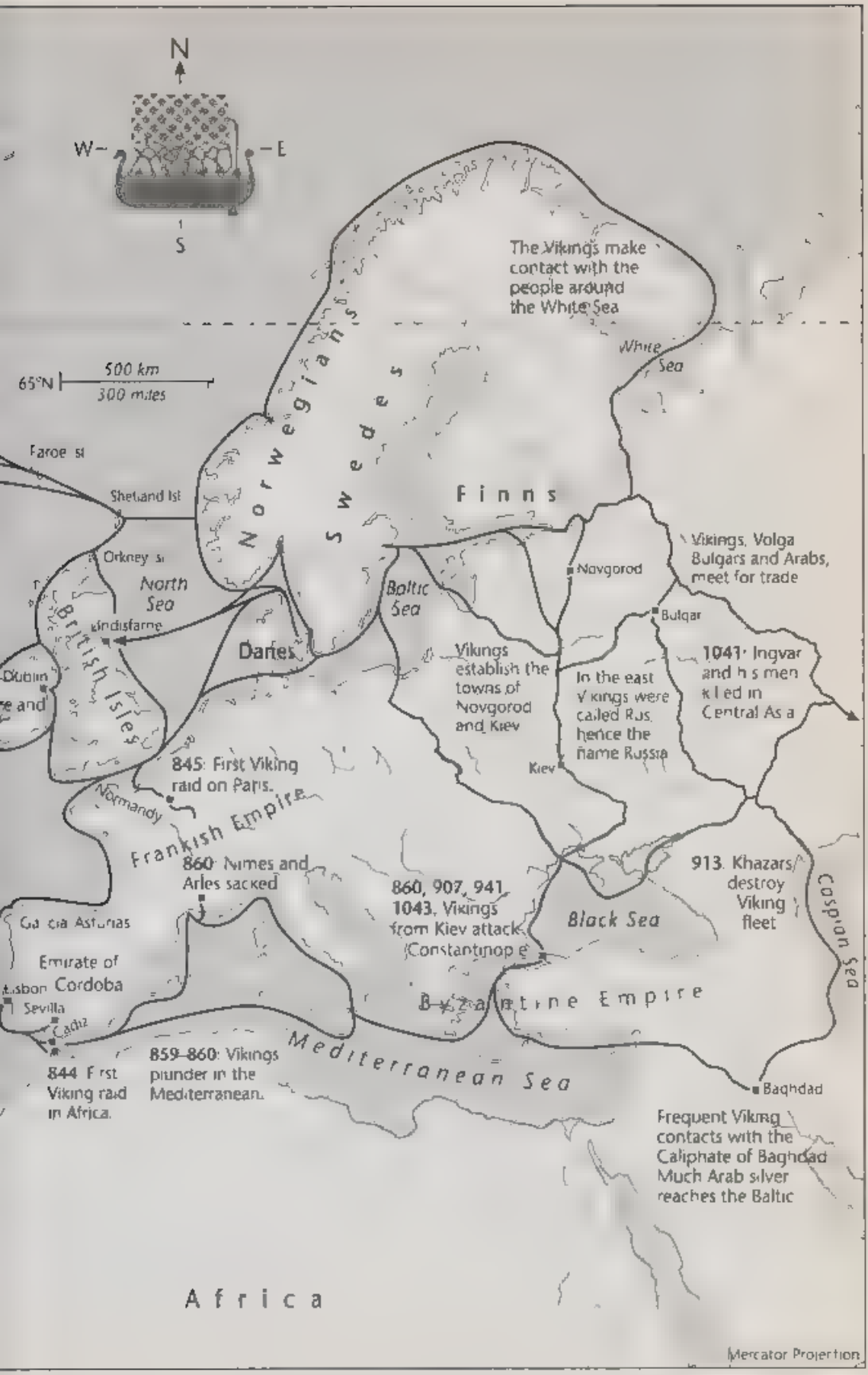
The Prose Edda: Norse Mythology



Map 1: The World of the Vikings

From their Scandinavian homelands, Northmen journeyed in all directions. Some sailed to the far Arctic regions, hunting for walrus ivory, sealskins and furs. Others voyaged west across the North Atlantic seeking lands to settle as farmers and fishermen. They discovered and colonized the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland and unsuccessfully tried to settle North America (Vinland) shortly after the year 1000. Vikings plundered and conquered large parts of the British Isles and attacked the Frankish Empire, twice besieging Paris and acquiring Normandy (named for the Norsemen).

To the east, they sailed across the Baltic Sea, and then rowed down the rivers of Russia. Some went as far as the Caliphate of Baghdad, opening a major trade route between Northern Europe and the Middle East. Others sailed southwards across the Black Sea to Byzantium or Constantinople, the capital of the Greek speaking Byzantine Empire. From there, as merchants, raiders, and bodyguards to the Greek Emperors, they journeyed throughout the Near East and Mediterranean.


N
W
E
S
The Vikings make contact with the people around the White Sea
White Sea
65°N
500 km
300 miles
Faroe Is
Shetland Is
Orkney Is
North Sea
Norwegians
Swedes
Finns
Baltic Sea
Novgorod
Vikings, Volga Bulgars and Arabs, meet for trade
Bulgar
Lindisfarne
Dublin
British Isles
Danes
Vikings establish the towns of Novgorod and Kiev
In the east Vikings were called Rus, hence the name Russia
Kiev
1041: Ingvar and his men killed in Central Asia
845: First Viking raid on Paris.
Normandy
Frankish Empire
860: Nimes and Arles sacked
860, 907, 941, 1043, Vikings from Kiev attack Constantinople
913: Khazars destroy Viking fleet
Black Sea
Caspian Sea
Galicia Asturias
Emirate of Cordoba
Lisbon
Sevilla
Cadiz
Byzantine Empire
Mediterranean Sea
844 First Viking raid in Africa.
859–860: Vikings plunder in the Mediterranean.
Baghdad
Frequent Viking contacts with the Caliphate of Baghdad. Much Arab silver reaches the Baltic
Africa
Mercator Projection

The Saga of the Volsungs

Sigmund Draws the Sword from Barnstock

There was a king called Siggeir who ruled over Gautland. He was a powerful king and had many followers He paid a visit to King Volsung and asked for Signy's hand in marriage. The king took the proposal well, as did his sons, but Signy for her part was unwilling. Even so, she asked her father to make the decision, as he did in other matters that concerned her. It seemed advisable to the king to betroth her, and she was promised to King Siggeir. When the banquet and the marriage were to take place, King Siggeir was to feast at King Volsung's.

Using the best provisions, the king made ready for the feast. When the banquet was fully prepared the guests of King Volsung and King Siggeir came on the appointed day, and King Siggeir had many worthy men with him. It is said that large fires were kindled in the long hearths running the length of the hall, but in the middle of the hall stood the great tree that earlier was mentioned.

It is now told that when people were sitting by the fires in the evening a man came into the hall He was not known to the men by sight. He was dressed in this way: he wore a mottled cape that was hooded; he was barefoot and had linen breeches tied around his legs. As he walked up to Barnstock he held a sword in his hand

while over his head was a low-hanging hood. He was very tall and gray with age, and he had only one eye. He brandished the sword and thrust it into the trunk so that it sank up to the hilt. Words of welcome failed everyone Then the man began to speak: 'He who draws this sword out of the trunk shall receive it from me as a gift, and he himself shall prove that he has never carried a better sword than this one.'

Then this old man walked out of the hall, and nobody knew who he was or where he was going. They stood up now, and no one disputed whether or not to grasp the sword; each thought the one who reached it first would be best off The noblest men went up to it first, and then each of the others. No one who came forward succeeded in moving it, no matter which way he tried. Now Sigmund, the son of King Volsung, came forward. He grasped the sword, and drew it from the trunk. It was as if the sword lay loose for him. The weapon seemed so good to everyone that no one recalled ever seeing so fine a sword. Siggeir offered to weigh Sigmund out triple the sword's weight in gold, to which Sigmund answered: 'You could have taken this sword from where it stood, no less than I did, if it were meant for you to carry it; but now that it has come first into my hands, you will never obtain it, even should you offer me all the gold you own.' King Siggeir became angry at these words and thought the answer scornful. But since he was a very underhanded and deceitful man, he pretended not to care about this matter. That same evening, however, he thought of a means of paying Sigmund back. And, this is what later came about.

Siggeir Plots Revenge

Now there is this to be said: Siggeir went to bed with Signy that evening. The next day the weather was good King Siggeir said that he wanted to return home rather than to wait until the wind rose or the sea became impassable. It is not told that King Volsung or his sons held King Siggeir back, especially when King Volsung saw that Siggeir wanted nothing other than to leave the feast.

Then Signy spoke to her father: 'I do not wish to go away with Siggeir, nor do my thoughts laugh with him. I know through my foresight and that special ability found in our family that if the marriage contract is not quickly dissolved, this union will bring us much misery.' 'You should not say such things, daughter,' he replied, 'for it would be shameful both for him and for us to break our agreement without cause. And if it is broken we could neither have his trust nor bind him in a friendly alliance. He would repay us with as much ill as he could The one honorable thing is to hold to our side of the bargain.'

King Siggeir prepared for the homeward voyage Before he and his followers departed from the feast he invited King Volsung, his kinsman by marriage, to pay him a visit in Gautland in three months' time. King Volsung was invited with all his sons, and all the men that he wanted and thought befitting his dignity. By doing this King Siggeir wished to make up for his short comings in not staying more than one night during the

wedding celebration, for it was not the custom of men to behave that way. King Volsung promised to make the journey and to come on the appointed day. The in-laws parted and King Siggeir traveled home with his wife.

The Fall of Volsung

Now is the time to tell that King Volsung and his sons journeyed to Gautland at the appointed time, according to the invitation of their in-law, King Siggeir. They set off in three ships, all well manned, and the voyage went well When they arrived off Gautland in their ships it was already late evening.

That same evening Signy, the daughter of King Volsung, came and called her father and brothers together for a private talk. She told them of King Siggeir's plans: that Siggeir had gathered an unbeatable army, 'and he plans to betray you Now I ask you,' she said, 'to return at once to your own kingdom and gather the largest force you can; then come back here and avenge yourselves. But, do not put yourselves in this trap, for you will not escape his treachery if you do not do as I advise.'

King Volsung then spoke: 'All peoples will bear witness that unborn I spoke one word and made the vow that I would flee neither fire nor iron from fear, and so I have done until now. Why should I not fulfill that vow in my old age? Maidens will not taunt my sons during games by saying that they feared their deaths, for each man must at one time die. No one may escape dying that once, and it is my counsel that we not flee, but for

our own part act the bravest. I have fought a hundred times, sometimes with a larger army and sometimes with a lesser one. Both ways I have had the victory, and it will not be reported that I either fled or asked for peace.'

Then Signy cried bitterly and asked that she might not be made to return to King Siggeir. King Volsung answered. 'You must certainly go home to your husband and be together with him, however it goes with us.' Then Signy went home, and Volsung and his men remained there during the night. In the morning, as soon as dawn came, King Volsung ordered all his men to get up and go ashore, and to prepare for battle. They now all went on land fully armed, and they did not have long to wait before King Siggeir arrived with all his army. The hardest of battles took place between them; the king urged his men forward as fiercely as possible. It is said that King Volsung and his sons went through King Siggeir's ranks eight times that day, hewing on both sides And when they intended to do so yet again, King Volsung fell in the middle of his ranks with all his men except for his ten sons Because the force against them was overwhelming, they were forced to give way. His sons were seized and bound and taken away.

Signy learned that her father had been killed and her brothers taken prisoner and destined for death. She now asked King Siggeir to speak with her in private. Signy spoke: 'I want to ask that you not have my brothers killed so quickly, but rather that you have them put in stocks. For it is with me as in the saying, "the eye takes pleasure while it yet beholds" I do not ask anything

further for them, for I do not think it would be of any use.' Then Siggeir answered her: 'You are mad and out of your senses to plead for a worse misfortune for your brothers than that they be hewed down. But I will grant your request because I think it better that they suffer more and are tortured longer before they die.'

Siggeir had Signy's wish carried out. A great trunk was brought and fitted as stocks on the feet of the ten brothers somewhere in the woods. They sat there all that day until night. But at midnight an old she wolf came to them out of the woods as they sat in the stocks. She was both large and grim looking. She bit one of the brothers to death and then ate him all up. After that she went away.

In the morning Signy sent her most trustworthy man to her brothers to learn what had occurred. And when he returned, he told her that one of them was dead. She thought it would be grievous if they all shared the same fate, but she could not help them. What happened can be quickly told, for nine nights in a row that same she wolf came at midnight and each time killed and ate one of the brothers until all but Sigmund were dead. And now before the tenth night Signy sent her trusted man to her brother Sigmund. She gave him some honey and instructed him to smear it on Sigmund's face and to put some in his mouth. Her man went to Sigmund, did as he had been instructed, and then returned home.

As usual the same she wolf came in the night, meaning to bite Sigmund to death as she had his brothers. But then she caught the scent of the honey that had been rubbed on him. She licked his face all over with her

tongue and then reached her tongue into his mouth. He did not lose his composure and bit into the wolf's tongue. She jerked and pulled back hard, thrusting her feet against the trunk so that it split apart. But Sigmund held on so tightly that the wolf's tongue was torn out by the roots, and that was her death And some men say that the she wolf was Siggeir's mother, who had assumed this shape through witchcraft and sorcery

Signy Plots Revenge

Now Sigmund is free, and the stocks are broken. He stayed there in the forest. Once again Signy sent men to find out what had taken place and if Sigmund was alive And when they came, Sigmund told them all that had occurred between him and the she wolf. Then they went home and told Signy of the events. She went and met with her brother and they decided that he should make an underground dwelling in the woods. Things went on for a while with Signy hiding him there and bringing him what he needed. King Siggeir, however, believed that all the Volsungs were dead.

King Siggeir had two sons by his wife. It is said that Signy sent the elder, when he was ten years old, to meet with Sigmund so that the boy could help if Sigmund wanted to try to avenge his father. The boy now went to the woods and late in the evening arrived at Sigmund's underground dwelling. He was received well enough and told that he should make bread for them 'and I will look for firewood.' Sigmund handed him a sack of flour

and went himself to look for wood. But when he returned the boy had done nothing about making the bread. Now Sigmund asked if the bread was ready and the boy answered: 'I did not dare touch the flour sack because there is something alive in the meal.' Sigmund now realized that this boy was not so stouthearted that he would want the lad with him.

When brother and sister next met, Sigmund said that he thought himself no closer to having a companion, even though the boy was there with him. Signy answered: 'Then take the boy and kill him. He need not live any longer.' And so he did.

The winter passed, and the next winter Signy sent her younger son to meet with Sigmund. This story, however, does not need to be recounted at length, for things happened in much the same way, with Sigmund killing the boy at Signy's bidding.

Signy Gives Birth to Sinfjotli

It is now told that once while Signy was sitting in her chamber, a sorceress, exceedingly skilled in the magic arts, came to her. Signy said to her: 'I want the two of us to exchange shapes.' The sorceress answered: 'It shall be as you wish.' And she used her craft so that they changed shapes. The sorceress now took Signy's place as Signy wished. She slept with the king that night, and he did not notice that it was not Signy beside him.

Now it is to be told of Signy that she went to her brother's underground dwelling and asked him to give

her refuge for the night, 'for I have lost my way out in the forest, and I do not know where I am going.' He said that she could stay and that he would not refuse shelter to a woman alone, believing she would not repay his hospitality by betraying him. She entered his shelter and they sat down to eat. He frequently glanced at her and found her a fine and handsome woman. And when they had eaten their fill he told her that he wanted them to share one bed that night. She did not object and he had her next to him for three nights in a row. After that she returned home, met with the sorceress, and asked that they exchange shapes again, which the sorceress did.

And after a time Signy gave birth to a son. This son was called Sinfjotli. And when he grew up he was both large and strong, handsome of appearance, and very like the Volsung stock. He was not quite ten years old when Signy sent him to Sigmund in his underground shelter. Before sending her first sons to Sigmund, she had tested them by stitching the cuffs of their kirtles to their hands, passing the needle through both flesh and skin. They withstood the ordeal poorly and cried out in pain. She also did this to Sinfjotli, he did not flinch. Then she ripped the kirtle from him, so that the skin followed the sleeves. She said that it must certainly be painful for him. He replied, 'Such pain would seem trifling to Volsung.'

Then the boy came to Sigmund. Sigmund asked him to knead their flour while he went to look for firewood. He handed the boy a sack and then went off for the wood. When he returned, Sinfjotli had finished the baking. Then Sigmund asked if he had discovered any thing in the flour. 'I am not without suspicion,' he said,

'that there was something alive in the flour when I first began kneading, but I have kneaded it in, whatever it was.' Then Sigmund said and laughed as he spoke: 'I do not think you should make your meal from this bread tonight, for you have kneaded into it the most poisonous of snakes.' Sigmund was so hardy that he could eat poison with no ill effect. Sinfjotli, however, although he could tolerate poison externally, could neither eat nor drink it.

Sigmund and Sinfjotli Don the Skins

It is now to be told that Sigmund thought Sinfjotli too young to seek vengeance with him, and that he first wanted to accustom the boy to hardship. During the summers they traveled widely through the forests, killing men for booty. It seemed to Sigmund that Sinfjotli took much after the Volsung race. Nevertheless, he believed the boy to be the son of King Siggeir and to have the evil disposition of his father along with the fierce zeal of the Volsungs. Sigmund felt that Sinfjotli did not put much store in kinship, for the boy often reminded Sigmund of his grievances, strongly urging the man to kill King Siggeir.

One time, they went again to the forest to get themselves some riches, and they found a house. Inside it were two sleeping men, with thick gold rings. A spell had been cast upon them: wolfskins hung over them in the house and only every tenth day could they shed the skins. They were the sons of kings. Sigmund and Sinfjotli

put the skins on and could not get them off. And the weird power was there as before: they howled like wolves, both understanding the sounds. Now they set out into the forest, each going his own way. They agreed then that they would risk a fight with as many as seven men, but not with more, and that the one being attacked by more would howl with his wolf's voice. 'Do not break this agreement,' said Sigmund, 'because you are young and daring, and men will want to hunt you.'

Now each went his own way. And when they had parted, Sigmund found seven men and howled in his wolf's voice. Sinfjotli heard him, came at once, and killed them all. They parted again. Before Sinfjotli had traveled very far in the forest, he met with eleven men and fought them. In the end he killed them all. Badly wounded, Sinfjotli went under an oak tree to rest. Then Sigmund came and said: 'Why didn't you call?' Sinfjotli replied: 'I did not want to call you for help. You accepted help to kill seven men. I am a child in age next to you, but I did not ask for help in killing eleven men.' Sigmund leapt at him so fiercely that Sinfjotli staggered and fell. Sigmund bit him in the windpipe. That day they were not able to come out of the wolfskins. Sigmund laid Sinfjotli over his shoulder, carried him home to the hut, and sat over him. He cursed the wolfskins, bidding the trolls to take them.

One day Sigmund saw two weasels. One bit the other in the windpipe and then ran into the woods, returning with a leaf and laying it on the wound. The other weasel sprang up healed. Sigmund went out and saw a raven flying with a leaf. The raven brought the leaf to Sigmund,

who drew it over Sinfjotli's wound. At once Sinfjotli sprang up healed, as if he had never been injured.

Then they went to the underground dwelling and stayed there until they were to take off the wolfskins. They took the skins and burned them in the fire, hoping that these objects would cause no further harm. Under that magic spell they had performed many feats in King Siggeir's kingdom. When Sinfjotli was fully grown Sigmund thought he had tested him fully.

It was not long before Sigmund wanted to seek vengeance for his father Volsung, if it could be brought about. One day they left the underground dwelling and came late in the evening to King Siggeir's estate. They entered the outer room, which was in front of the main hall. Inside the room were ale casks, and there they hid themselves. The queen found out where they were and wanted to meet with them. And when they met, they decided that when it grew dark they would take revenge for their father.

Signy and the king had two young children. They played together in the hall with golden toys, rolling the toys along the floor and running after them. One gold ring was flung farther out, into the room where Sigmund and Sinfjotli were, and the boy ran after the ring to look for it. Then he saw two large, fierce men sitting there wearing long helmets and shining mail. He ran into the hall to his father and told him what he had seen. The king suspected treachery. Signy heard what they said. She rose up, took both children, went to the outer room to Sigmund and Sinfjotli and said they should know that

the children had betrayed them, 'and I would advise you to kill them.'

Sigmund said: 'I will not kill your children, even if they have betrayed me.' But Sinfjotli did not falter. He drew his sword and killed both children, casting them into the hall in front of King Siggeir. The king now stood up and called on his followers to seize the men who had been hiding in the entrance hall all evening. Men ran out, wanting to seize them, but Sigmund and Sinfjotli defended themselves well and valiantly. For a long while the one who was nearest them thought himself to have it the worst. But at last Sigmund and Sinfjotli were over powered and captured. They were bound and fettered, and there they sat all night.

Now the king considered what was the slowest death he could prepare for them. When morning came he had a large cairn built of stones and turf. When the mound was finished he had a huge stone slab set in the middle of the cairn so that one edge pointed upward and the other downward. The stone was so large that it reached both sides of the cairn and no one could go around it. Now he had Sigmund and Sinfjotli taken and put in the mound, one on each side of the stone, because he thought it worse for them not to be together, yet be able to hear each other. And when they were covering the mound with turf, Signy came up, holding some straw in her arms, and she threw it into the mound to Sinfjotli and told the thralls to conceal her act from the king. They agreed and then the mound was closed.

And when night came Sinfjotli spoke to Sigmund:

'I do not think that our food will run short for a while, for the queen has thrown some pork wrapped in straw into the mound.' And he felt the pork again and found that Sigmund's sword was stuck in it. He knew it by the hilt, for it was dark in the cairn. He told Sigmund and they both were overjoyed. Now Sinfjotli thrust the sword's point up over the rock and pulled hard. The sword bit into the slab. Sigmund grasped the point and they sawed the rock between them. They did not stop until the sawing was finished, as is told:

> They cut with might
> The massive slab,
> Sigmund, with his sword,
> And Sinfjotli.

They were now both loose together in the cairn and they sawed through both rock and iron, thus coming out of the mound. They went back to the hall. All the men were asleep. They carried wood to the hall and set the wood afire. Those inside woke up because of the smoke and the hall blazing around them. The king asked who had set the fire. 'Here am I with Sinfjotli, my sister's son,' said Sigmund, 'and we now want for you to know that not all the Volsungs are dead.'

Sigmund asked his sister to come out and receive from him esteem and great honor, for he wished in this way to amend her sorrows. She replied: 'Now you shall know whether I remember the slaying of King Volsung by King Siggeir. I had our children killed when I thought them too slow in avenging our father, and I came to you

in the forest in the shape of a sorceress, and Sinfjotli is our son. Because of this he has so much zeal; he is the child of both a son and a daughter of King Volsung. In everything I have worked toward the killing of King Siggeir. I have worked so hard to bring about vengeance that I am by no means fit to live. Willingly I shall now die with King Siggeir, although I married him reluctantly.' Then she kissed her brother Sigmund and Sinfjotli, walked into the fire, and wished them farewell. She died there with King Siggeir and all the retainers.

The kinsmen, Sigmund and Sinfjotli, gathered together men and ships, and Sigmund set out for his patrimony. There he expelled from the country the king who had set himself up as ruler after King Volsung. Sigmund now became a rich and excellent king, wise and ambitious. He married a woman called Borghild. They had two sons, one named Helgi and the other Hamund. And when Helgi was born, Norns came and set his destiny, saying that he would become the most famous of all kings. Sigmund had returned from battle and went with a leek to meet his son. He gave the boy the name Helgi, and as gifts for this name-fastening he granted Hringstead, Solfell, and a sword. He bid the child to advance himself well and to take after the race of the Volsungs. Helgi grew to be magnanimous and well loved and surpassed most other men in all accomplishments. It is said that he went warring when he was fifteen years old. Helgi was king over the troops, and Sinfjotli was asked to accompany him. Both commanded the men.

[. . .]

The Birth of Sigurd

It is now said that Hjordis gave birth to a son and the boy was brought before Alf's father, King Hjalprek. The king was pleased when he saw the boy's piercing eyes, and he said that none would be his like or equal. The child was sprinkled with water and named Sigurd. All say one thing about him: that none was his match in conduct and size. He was raised there with King Hjalprek, and all showed him great affection. And when all the most renowned men and kings in the ancient sagas are named, Sigurd must be counted the foremost in strength and accomplishments, in zeal and valor. Of these qualities he possessed more than any other man in the northern world. Sigurd grew up there with Hjalprek and was loved by everyone. Hjalprek betrothed Hjordis to King Alf and fixed her dowry.

Regin, the son of Hreidmar, was Sigurd's foster father. He taught Sigurd sports, chess, and runes. Among many other things, he also taught Sigurd to speak in several tongues, as was the custom for a king's son. One time, when they were both together, Regin asked Sigurd if he knew how much wealth his father had had and who was guarding it. Sigurd answered and said that the kings watched over it. Regin said: 'Do you trust them completely?' Sigurd replied: 'It is fitting that they guard it as long as it suits me, for they can watch over it better than I.'

Regin came another time to talk to Sigurd and said: 'It is strange that you want to be the stableboy of kings

or to go about like a vagrant.' Sigurd answered: 'That is not true, for I rule over everything with them. I can take whatever I want.' Regin said: 'Ask him to give you a horse.' 'It will be done as soon as I wish,' answered Sigurd.

Sigurd met now with the kings. Then the king said to Sigurd, 'What do you want from us?' Sigurd replied: 'I would accept a horse for my entertainment.' The king said: 'Choose yourself a horse and anything else you want that we possess.'

The next day Sigurd went to the forest and met an old man with a long beard. The man was unknown to Sigurd. He asked where Sigurd was going. Sigurd answered: 'I am going to choose a horse. Advise me in this.' The man responded: 'Let us go and drive them to the river called Busiltjorn.'

They drove the horses out into the deep river and all swam ashore but one, Sigurd took this one. It was gray in color, young in age, very large and handsome. No one had ever mounted this steed. The bearded man said: 'This horse is descended from Sleipnir. He must be raised carefully, because he will become better than any other horse.' The man disappeared then. Sigurd called the horse Grani, and he was the best horse there ever was. It was Odin whom Sigurd had met.

Again Regin spoke to Sigurd: 'You have too little wealth. It vexes me that you run around like a messenger boy. But I can tell you where there is great wealth to be had. And it is likely that there would be honor in seeking it and glory should you acquire it.' Sigurd asked where this wealth might be and who was watching over it.

Regin answered: 'He is named Fafnir, and he is lying a short way from here at a place called Gnitaheath. When you get there, you will say that never have you seen in one place more riches in gold. And you will not need more, even if you become the oldest and most famous of kings.'

Sigurd answered: 'Although I am young, I know the nature of this serpent, and I have heard that no one dare go against him because of his size and ferocity.' Regin replied: 'That is not true. His size is no different from that of other grass snakes and more is made of it than it deserves. And so it would have seemed to your fore fathers. Although you are of the Volsung stock, you do not appear to have the spirit of that kin, which is figured the foremost in every form of distinction.'

Sigurd said: 'It may be that I do not have much of their valor or skill, but there is no need to taunt me when I am yet little past childhood. But why do you urge me on so strongly?' Regin replied: 'There is a tale behind this, and I will tell it to you.' 'Let me hear it,' said Sigurd.

The Otter's Ransom

'This tale begins with my father, who was named Hreid mar, a great and wealthy man. One of his sons was named Fafnir, another Otr, and I was the third, the least accomplished and the least honored. I knew how to work iron as well as silver and gold, and from everything

I could make something useful. My brother Otr had a different occupation and nature. He was a great fisherman and surpassed other men in this skill. He had the likeness of an otter during the day and was always in the river bringing up fish in his mouth. He brought his catch to his father and thus greatly helped him. He was in many ways like an otter. He came home late and ate alone with his eyes shut, because he could not stand seeing his food diminish. Fafnir was by far the largest and the fiercest of the sons, and he wanted to call everything his own.

'There was a dwarf named Andvari,' said Regin 'He was always in the waterfall called Andvari's Fall. He was in the shape of a pike and caught food there for himself, for there were many fish in the falls. My brother Otr used to go into the waterfall and bring up fish in his mouth, laying them one by one on the bank. Odin, Loki, and Hœnir were traveling and came to Andvari's Fall. Otr had caught a salmon and was eating it, half dozing on the riverbank. Loki took a stone and struck the otter to death. The Æsir considered themselves fortunate in their catch and skinned the otter.

'That evening they came to Hreidmar's and showed him the catch. Then we seized them, imposing as their fine and ransom that they must fill the skin with gold and cover the outside with red gold. They sent Loki to obtain the gold. He went to Ran and got her net. Next he went to Andvari's Fall and cast the net out for the pike, and it leapt into the net. Then Loki said,

Which is the fish
That runs through the flood,
And knows not to guard himself from danger?
Your head,
Ransom it from Hel
And find me the fire of the well.

Andvari is my name,
Odin was my father;
Many a falls have I fared over.
A wretched Norn
Destined in ancient days
That I should wade in water.

Loki saw Andvari's gold. And when Andvari had handed over the gold he kept one ring back. But Loki took it from him. The dwarf went into the rock and said that the gold ring would be the death of whoever owned it, and the same applied to all the gold.

The Æsir delivered the riches to Hreidmar, stuffed the otter skin, and set it on its feet. They then had to pile up the gold next to it and cover the outside. And when that was done, Hreidmar came forward and saw one whisker and demanded that it be covered. Then Odin drew the ring, Andvaranaut, from his hand and covered the hair. Then Loki said,

With gold you are now paid
And as payment you have
Much for my head.
No ease

Is assigned to your son;
Death it is to you both.

'Afterward Fafnir killed his father,' continued Regin, 'and it was murder since he hid the body. I obtained none of the treasure. Fafnir became so ill-natured that he set out for the wilds and allowed no one to enjoy the treasure but himself. He has since become the most evil serpent and lies now upon this hoard. Afterward I traveled to the king and became his smith. And this is the story of how I lost the legacy of my father and compensation for my brother. Gold has since then been called Otter's Ransom and is spoken of as such.'

Sigurd answered: 'You have lost much, and your kinsmen have been vile.'

Regin Fashions Gram

Sigurd said: 'Make a sword now with your skill so that its equal has never been made. Do this and I will be able to work great deeds if courage helps, and if you want me to kill this dragon.' Regin said: 'With confidence I shall make it and you will be able to kill Fafnir with this sword.'

Regin now made a sword. He gave it to Sigurd, who took it and said: 'This is your smithying, Regin.' Sigurd struck the anvil and the sword broke. He threw down the blade and told Regin to forge another, better one.

Regin made a second sword and brought it to Sigurd. He considered it. 'You will like this one, though you are

a hard man to forge for ' Sigurd tried the sword and he broke it like the first one. Then Sigurd said to Regin 'You are untrustworthy, just like your forefathers.'

Sigurd went now to his mother. She greeted him well. They talked with each other and drank. Then Sigurd said: 'Have I heard rightly that King Sigmund gave you the sword Gram in two pieces?' 'That is true,' she replied. 'Give it to me,' Sigurd said. 'I wish to have it.'

She said he was likely to win renown and gave him the sword. Sigurd met now with Regin and told him to make a sword worthy of these fragments. Regin became angry and went to his forge with the pieces of the sword. He thought Sigurd demanding about the metalwork. Now Regin made a sword. And when he brought it out of the forge, it seemed to the apprentices as if flames were leaping from its edges He told Sigurd to take the sword and said he was no swordsmith if this one broke. Sigurd hewed at the anvil and split it to its base. The blade did not shatter or break. He praised the sword highly and went to the river with a tuft of wool, which he threw in against the current. The sword cut the wool in two when the tuft ran against the blade. Sigurd went home contented.

Regin said 'You must fulfill your vow, now that I have made the sword, and go to meet Fafnir ' Sigurd replied· 'I will fulfill it, but first there is another task, I must avenge my father ' The older Sigurd grew, the more he was loved, and every mother's child held him dear.

[. . .]

Regin and Sigurd Go Riding

Now Sigurd and Regin rode up onto the heath and onto the track along which Fafnir was accustomed to crawl when he went to drink. And it is said that this cliff was thirty fathoms high at the spot where Fafnir lay to get water. Then Sigurd said. 'You told me, Regin, that this dragon was no larger than a serpent, but his tracks seem excessively large to me.' Regin said 'Dig a ditch and sit in it, and then, when the serpent crawls to the water, pierce him in the heart and thus cause his death. You will win great renown from such a deed.' Sigurd asked: 'But what will happen, if I get in the way of the dragon's blood?' 'No one can advise you, if you are afraid of everything. You are not like your kin in courage,' replied Regin.

Now Sigurd rode onto the heath, and Regin ran off in fear. Sigurd dug a ditch. And while he was working on it, an old man with a long beard came to him and asked what he was doing. Sigurd told him. Then the old man responded: 'That is ill advised. Dig several ditches for the blood to run into; then you sit in one of them and thrust at the heart of the worm.' Then this man disappeared. And Sigurd dug the ditches in the manner described to him.

When the worm crawled to the water the earth quaked mightily, so that all the ground nearby shook He blew poison over all the path before him, but Sigurd was neither afraid of nor concerned by the din. And when the serpent crawled over the pit, Sigurd plunged

the sword up under the left shoulder, so that it sank to the hilt. Then Sigurd leapt up out of the ditch, and drew the sword out of the serpent. His arms were all bloody to the shoulder. And when the huge worm felt his mortal wound he thrashed his head and his tail, destroying everything that got in his way.

And when Fafnir received his death wound, he asked: 'Who are you, or who is your father, or who is your family, you who are so impudent that you dare to bear weapons against me?' Sigurd replied: 'My family is unknown to men. I am called the noble beast. I have neither father nor mother, and I have traveled alone.' Fafnir answered: 'If you have neither father nor mother, from what wonder were you born? And although you will not tell me your name on my dying day, you know that you are lying.' He answered. 'My name is Sigurd and my father is Sigmund.'

Fafnir then asked: 'Who urged you on to this deed, and why did you let yourself be persuaded? Have you not heard that all people are afraid of me and my helm of terror? Boy with the sharp eyes, you had a keen father.' Sigurd said: 'A hard mind whetted me for this deed and I was supported in it by this strong hand and this sharp sword, which you are now familiar with. Few are bold in old age who are cowardly in childhood.'

Fafnir said: 'I know that if you had grown up with your kinsmen you would know how to fight when angered. But it is yet stranger that a prisoner taken in war should have dared to fight me, because few captives are valiant in a fight.' Sigurd spoke: 'You revile me for being removed from my kinsmen. Even though I was

taken in war, I was not bound, and you have discovered that I was free.' Fafnir answered: 'You take everything I say as spoken with malice. But this gold that was mine will be your death.' Sigurd replied: 'Everyone wants to have wealth until that one day, but everyone must die sometime.' Fafnir said: 'You do not want to heed my advice, but you will drown if you voyage unwarily by sea. Remain instead on land until it is calm.'

Sigurd said: 'Tell me, Fafnir, if you are so wise, who are the Norns, who separate sons from their mothers?' Fafnir replied: 'They are many and sundry. Some are of the race of Æsir, some are of the race of elves, and some are the daughters of Dvalin.' Sigurd said: 'What is the name of that island where Surt and the Æsir will mix together their blood?' Fafnir answered: 'It is called Oskapt, the uncreated.'

And again Fafnir spoke: 'My brother Regin caused my death, but it gladdens me that he will also cause your death. And it will go as he wishes.' Again Fafnir spoke: 'I have borne a helm of terror over all people since I lay on my brother's inheritance. And I blew poison in all directions around me, so that none dared come near me, and I feared no weapon. I never found so many men before me that I did not think myself much stronger, and everyone was afraid of me.' Sigurd said: 'This helm of terror you speak of gives victory to few, because each man who finds himself in company with many others must at one time discover that no one is the boldest of all.'

Fafnir answered: 'I suggest you take your horse and ride away as fast as you can, because it often happens

that he who receives a mortal wound avenges himself.' Sigurd said: 'That is your advice, but I will do otherwise. I will ride to your den and there take the massive hoard of gold which your kin possessed.' Fafnir replied: 'You will ride there, where you will find so much gold that it will be plentiful for the rest of your days. And that same gold will be your death, as it will be the death of all who possess it.' Sigurd stood up and said: 'I would ride home, even though it would mean losing this great treasure, if I knew that I would never die. But every brave man wants to be wealthy until that one day. And you, Fafnir, lie in your death throes until Hel has you.' Then Fafnir died.

Regin Drinks Fafnir's Blood

After Fafnir died Regin came to Sigurd and said: 'Hail, my lord. You have won a great victory, as you have killed Fafnir. None before were so bold as to dare to sit in his path. And this glorious feat will live on while the world remains.' Regin stood and looked down at the ground for a long time. Then afterward he said with much emotion: 'You have killed my brother, but I am hardly blameless in this deed.'

Sigurd took his sword Gram, dried it off on the grass, and said to Regin: 'You went quite far away when I performed this deed. I tested this sharp sword with my own hand, pitting my strength against the serpent's might, while you lay in a heather bush confused, not knowing whether it was heaven or earth.' Regin

answered: 'That serpent might have lain a long time in his den, if you had not enjoyed the sword I made for you with my own hands. Neither you nor anyone else would yet have accomplished this deed.' Sigurd replied. 'When men come to battle, a fearless heart serves a man better than a sharp sword.' Then out of deep sorrow Regin repeated to Sigurd: 'You have killed my brother and I can hardly be considered blameless in this deed.'

Then Sigurd cut the heart out of the serpent with the sword called Ridill. Regin drank Fafnir's blood and said: 'Grant me one request, a trifle for you. Go to the fire with the heart, roast it, and give it to me to eat.' Sigurd went and roasted Fafnir's heart on a spit. And when the juice foamed out he tested it with his finger to see whether it was done. He stuck his finger in his mouth. And when the blood from the serpent's heart touched his tongue, he could understand the speech of birds. He heard the nuthatches chirping in the brush near him.

Sigurd Eats the Serpent's Heart

'There sits Sigurd, roasting Fafnir's heart. Better he should eat it himself,' said a bird. 'Then he would be wiser than any man.' Another said: 'There lies Regin, who wants to betray the one who trusts him.' Then a third spoke: 'He should strike Regin's head off; then he alone would control the huge store of gold.' Then a fourth spoke: 'Sigurd would be wise to follow their advice. Afterward he should ride to Fafnir's den and take the magnificent hoard of gold which is there, and then

ride up to Hindarfell, where Brynhild sleeps. There he will find great wisdom. He would be wise to take your advice and consider his own needs. I suspect a wolf where I see a wolf's ears.' Then a fifth said: 'He is not as wise as I thought if he spares Regin after having killed his brother.' Then a sixth spoke: 'It would be a wise course if Sigurd killed Regin and took the treasure for himself.'

Then Sigurd said: 'It will not be my ill fate that Regin shall be my death. Rather, both brothers should go the same way.' He now drew the sword Gram and cut off Regin's head. After that he ate some of the serpent's heart and kept some. He then leapt onto his horse and rode along Fafnir's trail until he came to the lair, which he found open. All the doors were made of iron, as were all their fastenings. All the posts in the house were also of iron, and they had been sunk into the earth. There Sigurd found an enormous store of gold, as well as the sword Hrotti. He took from there the helm of terror, the golden coat of chain mail, and many other precious things. He found so much gold that he expected it to be more than two or even three horses could carry. He took all the gold and put it into two large chests and then took Grani by the bridle. The horse would not budge and whipping was useless. Sigurd now discovered what the horse wanted. He leapt onto his back and put spurs to him and the horse ran as if unencumbered.

Concerning Sigurd

Sigurd now rode a long way, until he came up on Hindarfell; then he turned south toward Frakkland. Ahead of him on the mountain he saw a great light, as if a fire were burning and the brightness reached up to the heavens. And when he came to it, there stood before him a rampart of shields with a banner above it. Sigurd went into the rampart and saw a man lying there asleep, dressed in full armor. First he removed the helmet from the man's head and saw that it was a woman. She was in a coat of mail so tight that it seemed to have grown into her flesh.

He sliced through the armor, down from the neck opening and out through the sleeves, and it cut like cloth. Sigurd said she had slept too long. She asked what was so strong that it could slash through her coat of mail 'and rouse me from sleep. Or is it that Sigurd the son of Sigmund has come, the one who has the helmet of Fafnir and carries Fafnir's bane in his hand?' Sigurd replied: 'He is of the line of Volsung who has done this work. And I have heard that you are the daughter of a powerful king. I have also been told of your beauty and wisdom, and these I will put to the test.'

Brynhild said that two kings had fought. One, called Hjalmgunnar, was old and was a great warrior, and Odin had promised him the victory. The other was Agnar or Audabrodir. 'I struck down Hjalmgunnar in battle, and Odin stabbed me with a sleeping thorn in revenge. He said I should never afterward have the victory. He also

said that I must marry And I made a countervow that I would marry no one who knew fear ' Sigurd said. 'Teach me the ways of mighty things.'

She answered 'You know them better than I. But gladly I will teach you, if there is anything I know that will please you about runes or other matters that concern all things. Let us drink together and may the gods grant us a fair day, that you may gain profit and renown from my wisdom, and that you will later remember what we speak of ' Brynhild filled a goblet, gave it to Sigurd, and spoke:

Beer I give you,
Battlefield's ruler,
With strength blended
And with much glory.
It is full of charmed verse
And runes of healing,
Of seemly spells
And of pleasing speech.

Victory runes shall you know
If you want to secure wisdom,
And cut them on the sword hilt,
On the center ridge of the blade,
And the parts of the brand,
And name Tyr twice.

[. .]

The Disappearance of Gudrun

Everyone who now heard the news (of Sigurd's death) said that no man of Sigurd's like remained in the world, and never again would a man be born equal to Sigurd in all things. His name would never be forgotten in the German tongue and in the northern lands, as long as the world endures.

It is told that one day, while sitting in her chamber, Gudrun said: 'My life was better when Sigurd was mine. He surpassed all men as gold does iron, the leek other herbs, and the stag other animals, until my brothers begrudged me such a man, the foremost of all. They could not sleep until they had killed him. Grani made a great din when he saw his wounded master. Later I spoke with him as if he were a man, but his head dropped toward the earth and he knew that Sigurd had fallen.'

Then Gudrun disappeared into the forest All about her she heard the cries of wolves, and she thought it would be more agreeable to die than to live. Gudrun journeyed until she came to the hall of King Half. She stayed there in Denmark with Thora, the daughter of Hakon, for seven half years, and she was treated with generous hospitality. Gudrun wove a tapestry on which she depicted many great deeds as well as fair games, which were common in those days. It also showed swords and mail coats and all the trappings of a king, as well as the ships of King Sigmund, sailing off the coast. Gudrun and Thora embroidered the battle of Sigar and Siggeir at Fjon in the south. Such was their entertain

ment, and Gudrun was now somewhat comforted in her sorrow.

Grimhild (Gudrun's mother), finding out where Gudrun had settled, summoned her sons (Gunnar and Hogni) to speak with her. She asked them how they wanted to compensate Gudrun for her son and her husband, and said they were obligated to do so. Gunnar spoke, declaring that he would give her gold to recompense her for her grief. They summoned their friends, readied their horses, and prepared their helmets, shields, swords, coats of mail, and all kinds of armor. The expedition was outfitted most splendidly, and no champion of merit stayed at home. The horses were armored and every knight had either a gilded or a brightly polished helmet. Grimhild decided to join them on their journey, saying that their errand would be completed only if she did not stay at home. In all there were five hundred men, among them men of renown: Valdamar of Denmark and Eymod and Jarisleif. They entered King Half's hall. There were Langobards, Franks, and Saxons. They traveled in full armor and wore red fur cloaks, as is told:

> Short mail coats,
> Molded helmets,
> Swords girded,
> Their hair cut short and brown.

They wanted to select fine gifts for their sister, and they spoke well to her. Yet, she trusted none of them. Then Grimhild brought Gudrun an evil potion which she was made to accept, and afterward she remembered

none of her grievances. The drink was mixed with the strength of the earth and the sea and the blood of her son, while the inside of the drinking horn was carved with all manner of runes, reddened with blood, as is here told:

The horn was lined
With runes manifold,
Carved and cut with blood.
Conceive them I could not:
The long ling-fish
Of the Haddings' land,
Ears of corn uncut,
Entrails of beasts.

In that ale were
Evils aplenty:
Herbs of all trees
And acorn burned,
Hearth's black dewfall,
Entrails offered,
Boar's liver boiled,
So that blunted were claims.

After that, when their desires were in accord, there was great rejoicing. When she met Gudrun, Grimhild said: 'Good fortune to you, daughter. I give you gold and all kinds of treasure from your father's legacy, precious rings and bed hangings of the most gracious Hunnish maids. Thus you will be compensated for your husband. Then you will be given in marriage to King

Atli the Powerful (Attila the Hun). You will rule over his wealth. But do not abandon your kinsmen for the sake of one man; instead, you must do as we ask.' Gudrun answered: 'I will never marry King Atli. There is for us no honor in augmenting our kin through such a union.'

Grimhild replied: 'You must not now plan revenge If you have sons, behave as if Sigurd and Sigmund were alive ' Gudrun said: 'Never will Sigurd be far from my thoughts, for he was best among men.' Grimhild insisted: 'You are ordered to marry King Atli, or you shall not marry at all.' Gudrun answered her: 'Do not offer me this king, for from my marriage with him only grief for our family will arise. He will treat your sons cruelly and afterward grim vengeance will fall upon him ' Grimhild, disturbed by Gudrun's statements about her sons, said: 'Do as we ask and you will receive great honor and our friendship, as well as the regions that go by the names of Vinbjorg and Valbjorg.' Grimhild's words carried such weight that this had to come about. Gudrun said: 'This must happen then, although it be against my will. And it will lead to little joy. Rather, it will bring grief '

They all then mounted their horses and their women were put in wagons. They traveled for seven days by horse, another seven by ship, and the third seven again over land, until they came to a high palace. A large number of people came to greet Gudrun and a splendid feast was prepared, as had earlier been agreed between them. The banquet proceeded with honor and magnifi cence. At this feast Atli drank the marriage toast to Gudrun. But her thoughts never laughed with him, and their life together contained little affection.

Gudrun Carves Runes

Now it is said that on a certain night King Atli awoke from his sleep. He spoke with Gudrun. 'I dreamt,' he said, 'that you thrust at me with a sword.' Gudrun interpreted the dream, saying that to dream of iron indicated fire and 'your self deception in thinking yourself the foremost of all.'

Atli then said: 'I dreamt further. It seemed to me that two reeds were growing here and I wanted never to harm them. Then they were torn up by the roots and reddened with blood, brought to the table, and offered to me to eat. I then dreamt that two hawks flew from my hand, that they had no prey to catch, and thus went down to Hel. It seemed to me that their hearts were mixed with honey and that I ate of them. Afterward it seemed to me that handsome whelps lay before me and cried out loudly, and I ate their corpses unwillingly.' Gudrun said: 'Your dreams do not bode well, yet they will be fulfilled. Your sons are fated to die and many oppressive events are in store for us.' 'Furthermore I dreamt,' he said, 'that I lay bedridden and that my death had been contrived.'

Now time passed and their life together was cold. King Atli pondered the whereabouts of the hoard of gold that Sigurd had owned, but of which only King Gunnar and his brother now knew. Atli was a great and powerful king; he was wise and had a large following. He took counsel with his men as to which course of action should be followed He knew that Gunnar and his kin had more

wealth than anyone else. He now resolved to send men to meet the brothers, invite them to a banquet, and honor them in many ways. A man called Vingi led King Atli's messengers.

The queen, aware of the king's private meeting with his counselors, suspected there would be treachery toward her brothers. Gudrun cut runes, and took a gold ring and tied a wolf's hair onto it. She gave it to the king's messengers who then departed as the king had ordered. Before they stepped ashore, Vingi saw the runes and changed them in such a way that Gudrun appeared to be urging the brothers to come and meet with Atli. Then they arrived at King Gunnar's hall; they were received well and large fires were built for them. They drank the finest drink with good cheer. Then Vingi said: 'King Atli sent me here to ask you to visit him in great honor and to receive great honor from him, as well as helmets and shields, swords and mail coats, gold and fine clothes, troops and horses, and a large fief. He declares it best that you succeed him.'

Gunnar turned aside and asked Hogni: 'What shall we make of this offer? He is asking us to accept vast power, yet I know of no kings with as much gold as we have, because we have all the gold that lay on Gnitaheath. We have large chambers filled with gold and with the best of edged weapons and all kinds of armor. I know my horse to be the finest and my sword the sharpest, the gold the most precious.' Hogni answered: 'I wonder at his offer, for it is not like him to behave in this way. It seems inadvisable to go to visit him. And when I looked at the treasures King Atli had sent us, I wondered at the

wolf's hair I saw tied around a gold ring. It may be that Gudrun thinks he has the thoughts of a wolf toward us, and that she does not want us to go.' Vingi then showed him the runes that he said Gudrun had sent them.

Now most people went to sleep, but some stayed up drinking with a few of the men. Hogni's wife, Kostbera, the fairest of women, went and looked at the runes. Gunnar's wife, named Glaumvor, was a woman of noble character. She and Kostbera served the drink, and the kings became very drunk. Vingi, observing their condition, said: 'It cannot be concealed that King Atli is too old and too infirm to defend his kingdom, and his sons are too young and unprepared. Atli wants to give you authority over his kingdom while they are so young. He would be most contented if you made use of it.' It happened that Gunnar by this time was very drunk and was being offered much power. He could also not escape his destiny. He vowed to make the journey and told his brother Hogni. Hogni replied: 'Your word must stand and I will follow you, but I am not eager to make this trip.'

When the men had drunk as much as they cared to, they went to bed. Kostbera began to look at the runes and to read the letters. She saw that something else had been cut over what lay underneath and that the runes had been falsified. Still she discerned through her wisdom what the runes said. After that she went to bed beside her husband. When they awoke she said to Hogni: 'You intend to go away from home but that is inadvisable. Go instead another time. You cannot be very skilled at reading runes if you think your sister has asked you to

come at this time. I read the runes and wondered how so wise a woman could have carved them so confusedly Yet it seems that your death is indicated underneath. Either Gudrun missed a letter or someone else has falsified the runes. And now you shall hear my dream.'

Hogni Interprets His Wife's Dream

'In my dream it seemed as if a turbulent river had rushed in here and broken up the beams in the hall.' Hogni replied: 'You often have premonitions of evil, but it is not my nature to show hostility toward men unless it is deserved. Atli will receive us well.'

She said 'You may put it to the test, yet friendship is not behind this invitation I dreamt again that another river rushed through here with a terrible uproar. It demolished all the benches in the hall, and broke the legs of you and your brother both. That must signify something.' 'Crop fields must stretch out there where you thought there was a river,' he replied. 'When we walk through a field the large husks often cover our legs.'

'I dreamt,' she said, 'that your bedcovers were ablaze, and that the fire leapt up from the hall.' He answered: 'I know quite clearly what that is. Our clothes are lying about neglected, and they are what will burn when your thoughts turn to bedcovers.'

'I thought a bear entered here,' she said 'He destroyed the king's throne and waved his paws so much about that we all grew afraid He had us all in his mouth

together, so that we could do nothing and great terror arose.' He answered. 'A strong tempest will come, where you thought it a white bear.'

'I thought an eagle entered here and flew through the hall,' she said, 'splashing me, and all of us, with blood That must bode ill, for it seemed to me that the eagle was the apparition of King Atli.' He answered: 'We often slaughter generously and kill large oxen for our pleasure. It signifies cattle when one dreams of an eagle. Atli means well by us.' Thus they ended their talk.

The Brothers' Journey from Home

It is told of Gunnar that the same thing happened when he and his wife awoke Glaumvor, Gunnar's wife, spoke of her many dreams which seemed to her to portend betrayal, but Gunnar gave them all a different meaning

'This was one of my dreams,' she said. 'I thought a bloody sword was carried here into the hall. You were pierced through with this sword, and wolves were howling at both ends of the sword.' The king answered: 'Little dogs will want to bite me there. The barking of dogs is often indicated by bloodied weapons.'

She said: 'Again I thought that somber looking women entered here and chose you as husband It could be that they were your *disir* ' He answered· 'Things are becoming difficult to interpret, but no one can avoid death It is not unlikely that I will be short lived.'

In the morning the men leapt up and wanted to leave, but others tried to dissuade them Then Gunnar spoke

to a man named Fjornir. 'Get up and give us good wine to drink from large goblets, for it may be that this will be our last banquet. The old wolf will now get to the gold if we die, and the bear will not hesitate to bite with his battle teeth. Then the weeping household led them out. Hogni's son said: 'Farewell and enjoy good fortune.'

Most of their warriors remained behind. Solar and Snaevar, the sons of Hogni, went with them, as well as a famous champion called Orkning, the brother of Bera. The people followed them to the ships and everyone tried to persuade them not to go, but it was to no avail Then Glaumvor spoke 'Vingi,' she said, 'it is very likely that serious misfortune will arise from your coming here and that significant events will arise from your journey. He replied 'I swear I am not lying. May the high gallows and all the demons take me if I lie with any word.' He did not spare himself in such speeches Then Bera said: 'Farewell, and may good fortune be with you.' 'Be of good cheer, whatever happens to us,' replied Hogni They parted there, each with his own destiny.

They rowed so hard and with so much strength that almost half the keel came loose from the ship. They hauled hard on the oars with long pulls, so that the handles and oar pins broke. And when they made land they did not secure their ships. Then for a time they rode their excellent mounts through a dark forest Finally they saw the king's dwelling. From there they heard a harsh clamor and the clash of arms. They saw a host of men and the many preparations they were making. At all the gates of the fortress there were crowds of men. The travelers rode up to the fortress but found it closed.

Hogni broke open the gate and they rode into the strong hold. Then Vingi said: 'You would better have left that undone. Now wait here while I look for a gallows tree for you. I asked you courteously to come here, but deceit lurked underneath. Now it will be only a short wait before you will be swinging aloft.' Hogni answered: 'We will not give way to you, and I doubt we will shrink back if this comes to a battle. It is of no use for you to try to frighten us; it will prove ill for you.' Then they threw Vingi down and beat him to death with the blunt ends of their axes.

The Battle in the Fortress and the Victory

They now rode to the king's hall. King Atli arranged his forces for battle; the formations were deployed so that a courtyard lay between them. 'Be welcome here with us,' he said, 'and give me the store of gold that belongs to me, the treasure that Sigurd possessed and Gudrun now owns.' Gunnar said: 'You will never get that treasure and, if you offer us hostility, you will come up against resolute men before we give up our lives. It may be that you will provide, with magnificence and with little stinginess, a feast for the eagle and the wolf.' 'For a long time,' replied Atli, 'I have intended to take your lives, to control the gold, and to repay you for your villainy when you betrayed your finest brother-in-law. And I shall avenge him.' Hogni answered: 'It is of no help to you to have plotted this deed for a long time, for you are not ready.'

A fierce battle then broke out, beginning with a shower of missiles. The news of the fighting came to Gudrun When she heard it, she grew heavy with anger and sorrow She threw off her cloak and then went out. She greeted those who had come, kissing her brothers and showing them affection This was their last greeting. She said: 'I thought I had contrived a way to prevent your coming here. But no one can withstand his fate ' And she added. 'Is there any use in seeking a settlement?' But they all flatly refused.

Gudrun, seeing that the game was going against her brothers, set a bold course She put on a mail coat, took up a sword, and fought beside her brothers, advancing like the most valiant of men. Everybody agreed that a stronger defense could hardly have been seen. A large number of men fell, yet the brothers' courage still sur passed that of others. The battle raged for a long time, right up to the middle of the day. Gunnar and Hogni went through King Atli's ranks, and it is said that the whole field was awash with blood. Hogni's sons pressed strongly forward King Atli said 'I had a large splendid army and proud champions, yet now many of us have fallen and we have ill to repay you. Nineteen of my champions have been killed, and only eleven remain '

There was a pause in the fighting. Then King Atli said: 'We were four brothers and now I am the only one left. I attached myself to a powerful family through a good marriage, thinking to further myself. I had a wise and beautiful wife, magnanimous and determined, but I could not benefit from her wisdom, for we seldom agreed. Now you have killed many of my relatives, cheated me of

treasure and kingdom, and contrived my sister's death, which grieves me the most.' Hogni replied: 'Why do you say such things? You broke the peace first. You took my kinswoman, starved her to death, murdered her, and took the treasure. Such conduct was not kingly, and I think it laughable that you are recounting your woes. I thank the gods that things are going badly for you.'

Hogni Is Captured

Now King Atli urged his troops to make a fierce assault. They fought valiantly, but the Gjukungs pressed forward so resolutely that King Atli was driven back into the hall. Now they fought inside and the battle raged savagely There was heavy loss of life and the battle ended with the brothers' whole army fallen. Gunnar and Hogni were the only two left standing Before that many a man was sent to Hel by their weapons. King Gunnar was now attacked and by dint of their superior strength, Atli's men seized and fettered him. Then Hogni fought on gallantly and courageously, killing twenty of King Atli's greatest champions. He flung many into the fire that had been built there in the hall. All were agreed that such a man had hardly ever been seen before. Nevertheless, at the end Hogni was overpowered and made prisoner. King Atli said: 'It is astonishing how many men have fallen before him. Now, cut out his heart and may that be his death.'

Hogni said: 'Do as you like. I will gladly await what ever you choose to do. You will see that my heart is not

timid and that I have encountered severe ordeals before. When I was not wounded, I willingly endured trials of adversity. But now I am sorely wounded, and you alone will decide our dispute.' A counselor of King Atli's then spoke 'I have a better idea Let us take instead the thrall Hjalli and spare Hogni. The thrall is destined for death, as long as he lives he will be trouble.'

The thrall, hearing what was said, cried loudly and ran away to wherever he saw hope of shelter. He said he had drawn a bad lot from their enmity and he was the one to pay. He declared it would be an evil day when he would die and leave his soft life and his pig keeping The men grabbed him and drew their knives out. He cried out loudly even before he felt the point. Then Hogni spoke, in a way that is customary for the strong when in deadly peril. he interceded for the thrall's life, saying he did not want to hear the shrieking, that this game was easier for himself to play. The thrall was then set free and granted his life.

Both Gunnar and Hogni were put in fetters. King Atli said to King Gunnar that he must tell him the location of the gold if he wanted to keep his life Gunnar replied: 'I would sooner see the bloody heart of my brother Hogni.' They seized the thrall a second time, cut out his heart, and carried it to King Gunnar. He said 'Here can be seen the heart of Hjalli the cowardly; it is unlike the heart of Hogni the valiant, for it quakes tremulously Yet it quaked even more when it lay in his breast '

Now, at the urging of King Atli, they seized Hogni and cut out his heart. Hogni's strength was so immense that he laughed while he suffered this torture. Everyone

wondered at his courage and it has been remembered ever since. They showed Gunnar the heart of Hogni. Gunnar answered: 'Here now can be seen the heart of Hogni the valiant; it is unlike the heart of Hjalli the cowardly, because it stirs little. Yet it stirred still less when it lay in his breast. So, Atli, you will lose your life as we now lose ours. I alone now know where the gold is, and Hogni cannot tell you. My mind wavered while we both lived, but now I alone have the decision. Rather shall the Rhine rule over the gold than the Huns wear it on their arms.' King Atli said: 'Take the prisoner away.' And it was done.

Gudrun now summoned men to her, met with Atli, and said: 'May misfortune go with you now, in the same measure as you kept your word to Gunnar and me.' King Gunnar was then placed in a snake pit with many serpents, and his hands were bound fast. Gudrun sent him a harp and he showed his skill by artfully plucking the strings with his toes. He played so exceedingly well that few thought they had heard such strumming even with the hands. And he continued playing skillfully until all the serpents had fallen asleep, except for one large and hideous adder which crawled up to him and burrowed with its head until it struck his heart. And there, with much valor, Gunnar lost his life.

The Conversation between Atli and Gudrun

King Atli now thought that he had won a great victory. He told Gudrun about it in a mocking tone, or as if he

were bragging: 'Gudrun,' he said, 'now you have lost your brothers, and you yourself brought it about.' She answered: You delight in announcing these killings to me, but you may regret what happened when you experience what follows The legacy that will endure the longest is undying cruelty. Things will never go well for you while I live.'

Atli replied: 'We two should now make our peace I will recompense you for the death of your brothers with gold and precious gifts, according to your desire.' 'For a long time I have not been easy to deal with,' she said, 'but I could tolerate matters while Hogni lived. You will never pay for my brothers to my satisfaction Yet we women are often forced to bow to your strength My kinsmen are now all dead and you alone have control over me I shall accept my lot Let us prepare a great feast – I will thus honor my brothers and your kin.' She spoke now with gentle words, although underneath she was no less afflicted. When she made herself speak so mildly, he was swayed and believed her words to be sincere.

Gudrun prepared a funeral feast for her brothers and King Atli did the same for his men. And it was a turbulent feast Gudrun thought about her sorrows and waited for a chance to bestow some profound dishonor upon the king In the evening she seized the sons she had by King Atli as they played beside their bedposts The boys became downcast and asked what they were supposed to do 'Do not ask, she replied. 'Both of you will be killed.' 'You may do with your children as you like, said

the boys. 'No one will hinder you, but there will be shame for you in this act.' Then she slit their throats.

The king asked where his sons were. Gudrun replied, 'I will tell you and gladden your heart. You caused me heavy sorrow when you killed my brothers. Now you shall hear what I have to tell you. You have lost your sons – on the table both their skulls are serving as cups and you yourself drank their blood mixed with wine. Then I took their hearts and roasted them on a spit, and you ate them.'

King Atli answered: 'Cruel you are to murder your sons and give me their flesh to eat. Little time is lost between your wicked deeds.' Gudrun said, 'It is my desire to bring grievous shame upon you. No punishment can ever be cruel enough for such a king.' The king spoke: 'Your monstrous deed is unparalleled in the memories of men. There is much lack of wisdom in such brutality. It is fitting for you to be stoned to death and burned on a pyre. Thus you would get what you deserve from choosing this path.' She replied: 'You prophesy this for yourself, but I will be allotted a different death.' They exchanged many malicious words.

Hogni had left behind a son named Niflung. He bore a profound hatred toward King Atli and told Gudrun that he wanted to avenge his father. She welcomed this idea, and together they conceived their plans. Gudrun said it would be a lucky deed if vengeance could be done. In the evening, when the king had drunk, he went to bed. When he was asleep Gudrun and the son of Hogni came. Gudrun took a sword and thrust it into King Atli's

chest. Both Gudrun and Hogni's son worked the deed together.

King Atli awoke at the wound and said: 'There is no need for bandages or for cures. But who inflicted this wound on me?' Gudrun said: 'I had a part in it, as did the son of Hogni.' King Atli said: 'It was not honorable for you to do this, although there was some cause for it. You were married to me at your relatives' counsel and I paid a marriage settlement for you of thirty good knights and comely maidens and many other men. Yet you would not comport yourself with moderation unless you controlled the lands that King Budli had possessed, and you often caused your mother in law to shed tears.'

Gudrun said: 'You have spoken much that is untrue, but I do not care about that. I was frequently harsh tempered, yet you made my temper much worse. There has often been much contention here in your court. Your relatives and your friends often fought and each baited the other. Life was better when I was with Sigurd. We slew kings and ruled over their territories, and we gave quarter to those who desired it. Leaders yielded to us and we granted riches to each one who so desired. Then I lost Sigurd. It was a small matter to be called a widow, but what distresses me most is that I came to you, whereas before I was married to the most noble of kings. You have never left a battle without being bested.'

King Atli replied: 'That is not true, but such discussions will better neither your lot nor mine, for I have been defeated. Now behave properly toward me and have my body prepared with splendor.' She said: 'That I will do. I will have a magnificent burial prepared and a fine stone

sarcophagus built for you. I will have you wrapped in fair cloths and consider your every need.' After this Atli died and Gudrun did as she had promised. Then she had the hall set afire When the king's retainers awoke in fear, they could not stand the flames. Instead they hewed at one another and thus they died. There ended the lives of King Atli and all his retainers.

Gudrun did not want to live after these deeds, but her final day had not yet come. People say the Volsungs and the Gjukungs were the mightiest and the most fearlessly resolute of men, as it is told in all the ancient lays. Thus the conflict was brought to an end with these events

The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki

King Helgi Attempts to Marry Queen Olof

At that time a queen named Olof ruled over Saxland Like a warrior king, she dressed in a coat of mail, carried sword and shield, and wore a helmet This was her nature: beautiful in looks, yet cruel and arrogant in temperament. Those who knew about such matters said that Olof was the best match in all the northern countries, but she had no intention of marrying any man.

King Helgi heard about this proud queen. It seemed to him that marrying the woman, whether she was willing or not, would increase his fame and importance. So one day he set off with a large company of armed men and, without warning, he landed in the country ruled by the powerful Queen Olof. Helgi sent messengers to her hall, requesting that the queen be informed that he expected a feast to be prepared for him and his company. His messengers transmitted his request to the queen, who was taken by surprise and had no chance to gather her forces. Making the best of the situation, she invited King Helgi to a feast along with all his following

Helgi arrived at the feast and had himself placed in the high seat beside the queen. The two drank together throughout the evening. Nothing was lacking and Queen Olof showed no sign of displeasure. King Helgi said to

the queen, 'The situation is this I want us to drink to our marriage this evening There are enough people here for such a celebration and tonight we will share one bed.'

She answered, 'It seems to me that this plan has moved too fast. Yet I do not think that I could find a man more courteous than you, if I were of a mind to attach myself to any man. But I certainly do not expect you would want to undertake such a union with dishonour.'

The king replied that it was fitting, because of her pride and arrogance, 'that we remain together for as long as it please me.'

She answered, 'I would choose to have more of my friends here, but since I can now do nothing you must decide this matter And I expect you to behave honourably toward me.'

The drinking continued throughout the evening and long into the night The queen was so cheerful that no one noticed in her anything other than that she thought well of the marriage. Finally, when Helgi was brought to bed, she was waiting there for him.

The king had drunk so much that at once he fell down asleep onto the bed Taking advantage of his state, the queen stuck him with a sleep thorn. When the last of the men had left, the queen got up She shaved off all his hair and smeared him with tar.

Next, she took a leather sack made for sleeping and placed some clothes in it After that she grabbed hold of the king and stuffed him into the sack Then she called her men and had them carry the king to his ships.

The queen next awakened Helgi's men, telling them

that their king had gone back to the ships and, because of a favourable wind, was planning to set sail. They jumped up, each one moving as fast as he could, but, drunk and confused, they scarcely knew what to do

When the men arrived at the ships, the king was nowhere to be found. They did, however, see that a large sack was there Curious about its contents, they decided to look while waiting for the king. They assumed that he would be coming a little later When they untied the sack, they found their king, shamefully tricked. The sleep thorn fell away, and the king awoke, though his dreams had not been pleasant. He was now in a vile temper regarding the queen.

But about Queen Olof, there is more to be told: She spent the night gathering her men and there was no lack of numbers. Meanwhile King Helgi could not decide how to get back at her When he and his men heard from the land the sound of trumpets and the blast of war horns, Helgi realized that it would be best to get away as quickly as possible As it turned out, a fair wind was blowing at the time. King Helgi sailed home to his kingdom, bearing this dishonour and disgrace He was filled with resentment about the outcome and often contemplated how to take vengeance on the queen.

King Helgi's Vengeance

Queen Olof remained now for a time in her kingdom; her arrogance and her overbearing manner had never been greater After the feast she had offered King Helgi,

she kept a strong guard around her. News of their dealings spread far and wide throughout the different lands. Everyone thought it a flagrant misdeed to have mocked such a king in this way.

Not long afterward King Helgi again set sail in his ships. This time he headed toward Saxland, making for the queen's royal residence. The queen had a large force ready, but Helgi landed his ships in a hidden inlet. He told his men to wait for him there until the third day and, if he had not returned by then, to go their own way.

Helgi took with him two chests filled with gold and silver. He obtained some rags which he used for outer clothing. He then made his way to the woods and hid the treasure there.

Next, going toward the queen's hall, he met one of her slaves. He asked the man for news of the country. The thrall said the times were peaceful and good and asked the stranger who he was. Helgi let on that he was a poor beggar.

'All the same,' Helgi said, 'I have found a huge treasure in the forest, and it seems advisable for me to show you where it is.' They went to the woods and he showed the slave the treasure. The slave was much impressed by the value of the treasure, believing that good fortune had struck.

'How greedy is the queen?' asked the beggar.

'She is the greediest of women,' replied the slave.

'Then this treasure will please her,' said the beggar. 'Though I found it, she will think she owns it because it is on her land. Good fortune must not now be turned to bad, so I will not hide this wealth. The queen can decide

on my share as she wishes, deciding what will suit me best But will she take the trouble to come here to get the treasure?'

'I am sure that she will,' answered the slave, 'if it is done secretly.'

'Here,' said the beggar, 'is a necklace and a ring These I will give to you if you succeed in persuading her to go alone into the woods On the other hand, I will devise a plan if she becomes angry with you.'

After discussing the matter, they arrived at a bargain. The slave went home and told the queen that he had found a huge cache of treasure in the woods, 'enough,' he said, 'to guarantee the happiness of many men ' He asked her to come with him quickly to retrieve the wealth.

She replied, 'If what you say is true, this story will make your fortune; if not, it will bring death to you But, since I have discovered you in the past to be reliable, I will trust in what you say.'

Then she showed just how greedy she was. So that no one else would know, she arranged that the two of them would go alone in the dead of night.

But when they came into the forest, Helgi was there waiting He grabbed hold of the queen and told her that their meeting was an ideal opportunity to avenge his disgrace.

The queen admitted that she had behaved badly toward him, 'But now, I want to make it all up to you, and you shall wed me honourably '

'No, he said, 'you will not have that choice. You will come with me to the ships and remain there for as long

as it pleases me. For my own pride's sake I must take some vengeance on you after the ugly and shameful way you toyed with me.'

'For now,' she said, 'you are the one who will decide.' The king then slept with the queen for many nights

Then the queen returned home. As just told, Helgi wreaked his vengeance on her, and now she became profoundly unhappy with her lot. King Helgi continued on his voyage, bringing war to others and acquiring fame.

THE GIRL YRSA

After some time, Queen Olof gave birth to a child. It was a girl. The queen treated the child with complete neglect. She had a dog named Yrsa; she called the little girl after it, so that the child came to be named Yrsa. She was a beautiful child, but when she was twelve years old she was sent to tend the herd. The girl was told only that she was the daughter of a poor farmer and his elderly wife. The deceit was possible because the queen had concealed her condition so well that only a few people knew that she had given birth.

So matters continued until the girl was thirteen Then King Helgi returned to Olof's lands and, curious to know what had happened there, he put on beggar's clothes He saw a large herd in a forest tended by a young woman. She was so beautiful that he thought he had never seen a more lovely woman. He asked her name and inquired about her family and kinship. She answered, 'I am the daughter of a poor man and am called Yrsa.'

'Your eyes are not those of a servant,' he said, and suddenly feelings of love welled up in him. He said it would be proper for a beggar to marry her, because she was a poor man's daughter.

Although she asked him not to do this, he took her with him back to the ships and sailed home to his kingdom.

When Queen Olof learned what had happened, she behaved deceitfully. In public she pretended to have no knowledge of the situation. In her private thoughts, however, she calculated that these events would bring grief and dishonour to King Helgi and that neither success nor joy would come of them. King Helgi married Yrsa and loved her very much.

THE RING

A ring owned by King Helgi was a widely famed treasure. Both brothers wanted it, and so too did their sister Signy. King Hroar once paid a visit to the kingdom of his brother King Helgi, who prepared a magnificent feast in Hroar's honour.

King Hroar said, 'Between us, you are the greater man. I have settled in Northumberland and therefore am now willing to grant you my share of the kingdom that we own jointly. I will make this agreement if you will share with me some of our treasured possessions. I want the ring, the one that is the best treasure in your possession and that both of us would like to own.'

'Brother,' said Helgi, 'after such a speech, nothing else is fitting but that you should have the ring.'

King Hroar returned home to his kingdom and remained there in peace.

[. . .]

The Elfin Woman and the Birth of Skuld

There was a king named Adils; he was powerful and greedy. From his stronghold at Uppsala, he ruled over Sweden. King Adils heard of Yrsa and prepared his ships, setting out to ask for an audience with Olof and Yrsa. Olof prepared a feast in honour of King Adils, regaling him with all manner of refinement and courtesy. King Adils asked for Queen Yrsa's hand in marriage.

Olof said, 'You must have heard about her situation. If she agrees to marry you, I will not oppose your request.' So Adils presented his suit to Yrsa. She responded, telling him that his chance of success was not good, 'because you are an unpopular king'.

Nevertheless the suit went forward. Yrsa was uncommitted either way, and it mattered little whether she said more or less concerning the proposal. But finally she accompanied King Adils when he sailed off. King Helgi was not notified, because Adils thought himself the more prominent of the two kings. King Helgi did not even know what had happened until after the couple arrived in Sweden, where King Adils had a splendid wedding feast prepared for Yrsa. It was news of this celebration that finally reached Helgi, who became twice as unhappy as before. King Helgi slept alone in a small detached

building. So matters continued for a while. Olof is now out of the saga.

It is said that one Yule evening King Helgi was in bed. The weather outside was foul, yet someone came to the door, tapping weakly on it. It occurred to Helgi that it was unkingly for him to allow any person, however wretched, to remain outside when he could help. So the king got up and opened the door. He saw someone or something, poor and tattered, standing outside.

After saying, 'You have done well, King,' it came into the room.

The king said, 'Take some straw and a bearskin for yourself so that you will not freeze.'

The visitor said, 'Let me into your bed, Sire. I want to sleep next to you, for my life is at stake.'

The king replied, 'You repel me, but if it is as you say, then lie down here along the side of the bed. Keep your clothes on, and I will not come to any harm.'

She did as the king asked, and he turned away from her. A light was burning in the house, and after a time, he glanced over his shoulder at her. What he saw was a sleeping woman so fair that he thought he had never seen anyone so beautiful. She was dressed in a silken gown. Quickly and tenderly, he turned toward her.

She said, 'Now I will leave. You have released me from a terrible bondage, which was my stepmother's curse. I have visited many kings, but none of them accepted me, because of my looks. I do not want to stay here any longer.'

'No,' said the king, 'there is no possibility that you may leave so soon. We will not part that way. I will

arrange a quick wedding for us, because you please me well.'

She said, 'You are the one to make the decision, my lord.' And so that night they slept together.

In the morning she spoke to him, saying, 'We have slept together because of your lust, and you will know that we will have a child. Do now as I tell you, King. Visit our child next winter at this same time down at your ships' landing. Unless you do so, you will pay for it.' After this, she went away.

The king was now somewhat happier than before

Time passed and Helgi forgot, giving no thought to the warning But after three winters, there is this to tell At midnight three people came riding up to the same house in which the king was sleeping They brought a girl-child with them and put her down outside the house

Then the woman, who was holding the child, said, 'You must know, King, that your kinsmen will pay for your ignoring my request Nevertheless, you will reap a benefit from having released me from the curse Be aware that the girl is named Skuld, and she is our daughter.' Then the people rode away

Skuld's mother was an elfin woman and the king never again saw or heard of her. Skuld grew up with the king; from an early age she showed a vicious temperament.

It is said that King Helgi prepared to set out on a voyage to forget his sorrow. Hrolf, his son stayed behind. King Helgi raided far and wide, performing great deeds.

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King Hring of Norway Marries Hvit

It is said that to the north in Norway a king named Hring ruled over Uppdales. He had a son named Bjorn. It is told that the queen died, and the king and many others found this a great loss. Hring's countrymen and counsellors asked him to remarry, and so he sent men to the south seeking a wife. But strong headwinds and powerful storms forced them to turn their prows around, letting the ships run before the wind. So it happened that driven by the wind, they were forced north to Finnmark, where they remained for the winter.

One day they went onshore. They walked inland and came to a house. Inside sat two beautiful women, who received them well. The women asked them where they had come from, and the king's men gave an account of their journey and explained their errand. They asked the women about themselves, inquiring why women so beautiful and refined were there alone, so far from other people.

The older woman answered, 'For everything, friends, there is a reason. We are here because a powerful king asked for my daughter's hand. Because she did not want to marry him, he threatened her with rough treatment. So I am keeping her here in this secret hiding place while her father is away at war.'

They asked who her father might be.

'She is the daughter of the King of the Lapps,' said the woman.

The men asked for their names.

The older woman replied, 'I am called Ingebjorg and my daughter is named Hvit. I am the Lapp king's mistress.'

A girl was there to serve them. The king's men, much taken with these women, decided to ask whether Hvit would go back with them and marry King Hring. The man in charge of the king's mission brought up the question. Hvit did not respond quickly; instead, she deferred the issue to her mother's consideration.

'As the old saying goes,' said her mother, 'out of every trouble comes some gain. But it displeases me that we are making this arrangement without first asking her father's consent. Nevertheless, it must be ventured, if Hvit is to get ahead.'

Hvit then prepared herself to go with them, and they started on the journey to King Hring. The messengers at once inquired whether the king wanted to marry the woman or if she should be sent back. The king, well pleased with the woman, married her at once. He was not concerned that she was neither rich nor powerful. At this time, the king was getting on in years, and the effects of his age were soon apparent in the queen's behaviour.

The Love of Bera and Bjorn

A freeman's farm lay a short distance from the king's estate. The farmer had a wife and one daughter, who was named Bera She was young and lovely to look at. Bjorn, the king's son, and Bera, the freeman's daughter,

had played together as children, and the two were very close. The freeman was wealthy; he had long been out raiding and in his youth had been a great champion. Bera and Bjorn loved each other deeply and they often met.

Time passed and nothing noteworthy took place. Bjorn, the king's son, matured to manhood. He grew large and strong; he was well bred and was accomplished in all skills. When King Hring was away at war for long periods, which frequently happened, Hvit stayed at home and governed the land. She was not well liked by the people; toward Bjorn, however, she was gentle and tender, though he paid no heed.

One time when the king was about to set out from home, the queen suggested that Bjorn should stay home to help her govern the land. The king thought that her proposal was advisable. The queen was now becoming overbearing and arrogant. The king told his son Bjorn to stay at home and watch over the kingdom with the queen. Bjorn replied that he had little liking for this idea and that he liked the queen even less. The king then told Bjorn to remain behind, and he then set out with a large force.

Bjorn Rejects Queen Hvit's Advances: The Curse

Bjorn went back to his quarters after arguing with his father, each thinking the other to be wrong. Bjorn, downcast and angry, his face as red as blood, then took to his bed. The queen, wanting to lift his spirits, spoke tenderly to him. He asked her to go away, which she did for a time.

The queen often spoke with Bjorn, telling him that, while the king was away, they had an opportunity to share one bed. She said that their living together would be much better than her experience with a man as old as King Hring.

Bjorn, taking this proposal badly, gave the queen a hard slap. He told her to leave him alone and then threw her out. She said that she was unaccustomed to being rejected or beaten. 'And it seems that you, Bjorn, think it preferable to embrace a commoner's daughter. You deserve a punishment, something far more disgraceful than enjoyment of my love and my tenderness. It would not come as a surprise if something should happen to make you suffer for your stubbornness and your stupidity.'

She then struck him with her wolfskin gloves, telling him to become a cave bear, grim and savage. 'You will eat no food other than your own father's livestock and, in feeding yourself, you will kill more than has ever been observed before. You will never be released from the spell, and your awareness of this disgrace will be more dreadful to you than no remembrance at all.'

Bjorn's Transformation into a Bear and the Birth of Bodvar

Then Bjorn disappeared, and no one knew what had become of him. When people realized that Bjorn was missing, they searched for him. As might have been expected, he was not to be found.

Next to be told is that the king's cattle were being killed in large numbers by a grey bear, large and fierce. One evening it happened that Bera, the freeman's daughter, saw the savage bear. It approached her unthreateningly. She thought she recognized in the bear the eyes of Bjorn, the king's son, and so she did not try to run away. The beast then moved away from her, but she followed it all the way until it came to a cave.

When she entered the cave, a man was standing there. He greeted Bera, the freeman's daughter, and she recognized that he was Bjorn, Hring's son. Theirs was a joyful reunion. For a time they stayed together in the cave, because she did not want to part from him while she still had a choice. He told her it was not right for her to be there with him, because he was a beast by day, even if he again became a man at night.

King Hring, when he returned home from the wars, was told everything that had happened while he was away. He learned about the disappearance of his son Bjorn. He was also told about the huge creature that had arrived in the land, attacking mostly the king's own livestock. The queen strongly urged killing the animal, but this was delayed for a time. The king expressed no opinion, even though he thought the events most unusual.

One night, while Bera and the prince lay in their bed, Bjorn began to speak, 'I suspect that tomorrow will be my death's day, for they will hunt and trap me. In truth, I find no pleasure in living, because of the curse that lies upon me. You are my only delight, but that too will now cease. I want to give you the ring that is under my left

arm. Tomorrow you will see the men stalking me. When I am dead, go to the king and ask him to give you whatever is under the beast's left shoulder, he will grant you this request.

'The queen,' Bjorn continued, 'will be suspicious of you when you want to leave. She will try to make you eat some of the bear's meat, but you must not eat it, because, as you well know, you are pregnant and will give birth to three boys. They are ours, and it will be obvious from their appearance if you have eaten any of the bear's meat. This queen is a great troll. Then go home to your father, where you will give birth to the boys, one of whom will seem best to you. If you are not able to raise them at home, because of their strange and uncontrollable natures, bring them here to the cave. You will find here a chest with three bottoms. Runes are carved on it, and they will tell what each of the boys should receive as his inheritance. Three weapons are imbedded in the rock, and each of our sons shall have the one intended for him. Our firstborn will be called Elk-Frodi, the second son, Thorir, and the third, Bodvar. It seems to me most likely that they will not be weaklings and that their names will long be remembered.'

Bjorn foretold many things to her, and afterwards the bear shape came over him. Then the bear went out, and she followed him.

When she looked around, she saw a great company of men circling the side of the mountain. A large pack of hounds raced in front of the men, and now the bear began to run. Turning away from the cave, he ran along the slope of the mountain. The hounds and the king's

men gave chase, but the bear proved difficult for them to catch. Before he was overtaken he maimed many men and killed all the dogs.

At last the men formed a ring around him. The bear ranged about inside the ring, but understood the situation and knew that he would not be able to escape. Then he attacked in the direction of the king. Grabbing the man who stood next to the king, he ripped the man apart while still alive. By then the bear was so exhausted that he threw himself down on the ground. The men seized the opportunity and quickly killed him.

The freeman's daughter saw these events. She went up to the king and said, 'Sire, will you give me what is under the beast's left shoulder?'

The king granted her request, saying that nothing there could be unsuitable to give to her. By then, the king's men were well along in flaying the bear. Bera went to the carcass and took the ring, hiding it carefully. The men did not see what she took, but then no one was paying much attention.

The king asked who Bera was, because he did not recognize her. She gave whatever answer she thought best, although it was not the truth.

The king then returned home and Bera found herself swept along among his followers. The queen, now very cheerful, made Bera welcome, inquiring who she was. As before, Bera concealed the truth.

The queen prepared a great feast and had the bear meat readied for the men's enjoyment. The freeman's daughter was in the queen's chamber, unable to get away because the queen was suspicious about her iden-

tity Sooner than expected, the queen entered the room with a plate of bear meat She told Bera to eat, but Bera did not want to eat.

'How uncommonly rude,' said the queen, 'that you reject the hospitality that the queen herself has chosen to offer you Eat it quickly, otherwise something worse will be prepared for you.'

The queen cut a small piece of the meat for Bera, and in the end Bera ate it. The queen then cut another piece and put it into Bera's mouth. Bera swallowed a small morsel of it, then spat the rest out of her mouth. She declared that she would not eat any more, even if she were to be tortured or killed. 'It may be,' said the queen, 'that this bit will be enough,' and she burst out laughing.

Bera then escaped and went home to her father. She had a very difficult pregnancy She told her father the whole story relating to her condition and the reasons for what had happened. A little while later she fell ill and gave birth to a boy, though of an extraordinary kind. He was a man above the navel, but an elk below that. He was named Elk-Frodi. She bore another son, who was named Thorir. He had dog's feet from his insteps down. Because of this, he was called Thorir Hound's Foot, otherwise, he was the most handsome of men. A third boy was born, and this one was the most promising. He was named Bodvar, and there was no blemish on him. Bera loved Bodvar the most.

The boys shot up like weeds When they were at the games with other men, they were fierce and unyielding in everything. Men received rough treatment at their hands. Frodi maimed many of the king's men, and some

of them he killed. So matters continued until the boys were twelve years old. By then, because they were so strong that none of the king's men could stand up to them, they were no longer permitted to take part in the games.

Next Frodi told his mother that he wanted to leave, because 'I am not able to contest with the men. They are nothing but fools, easily injured as soon as they are touched.'

She said that his being among people did not suit him, because he had an unyielding nature. His mother took him to the cave. She showed him the treasure that his father had intended for him, for Bjorn had long before determined what each son should have. Frodi, whose allotted share of the wealth was the smallest, wanted to take more but was unable to do so. Then he saw the weapons protruding from the rock. First he grasped the sword hilt, but it remained fast in the stone and he was unable to remove it. Next he seized the axe handle, but it too remained fast in the stone.

Then Elk-Frodi said, 'The one who brought these treasures here seems to have intended that the division of weapons should follow along the same lines as the division of the other property.'

He grasped the handle of the remaining weapon, a short sword that came loose at once. He looked at the sword for a while, and then said, 'The one who divided these treasures was unjust.'

Taking hold of the sword with both hands, he struck at the rock, intending to smash the weapon to pieces.

But the sword without breaking plunged into the stone right up to the hilt. Then Elk-Frodi said, 'No matter how I wield this nasty thing, it clearly knows how to bite.' After that he set out on his way, parting without even bidding his mother farewell. Frodi went to a road high in the mountains, where he attacked travellers, killing for money. He built himself a hut and settled in.

Thorir Becomes King of the Gauts

King Hring thought he now understood what magic lay behind all these events, yet he kept this to himself, behaving just as calmly as before.

A little later Thorir Hound's Foot asked permission to leave. His mother showed him the way to the cave and to the treasures that were intended for him. She spoke about the weapons, telling him to take the axe, declaring that his father had wanted him to have it. Then Thorir wished his mother farewell and left.

Thorir went first to the sword hilt, but the sword held fast. Then he grasped the axeshaft and the axe loosened, because it was intended for him. He took what was his and went on his way. He planned his journey so that he could first visit his brother Elk-Frodi. Thorir entered Elk-Frodi's hut and sat down, letting his hood slide over his face. A little later Frodi came home. He looked askance at the newly arrived man, then drew his short sword and said:

Growls the sword
leaving the sheath
The hand remembers
the work of battle

Driving his sword deep into the bench beside Thorir, Frodi became savage and threatening Thorir then said

I allowed
on another wide road
my axe to shout
the same sound.

Now Thorir stopped concealing himself, and Frodi recognized his brother He offered Thorir half of everything he had amassed, because he had no lack of wealth, but Thorir did not want to accept this gift. Thorir stayed with his brother for a while and then set off. Elk Frodi showed him the path to Gautland, advising him that the king of the Gauts had just died and that Thorir should go to their kingdom.

Elk-Frodi instructed Thorir, saying, 'It is the law of the Gauts that a great assembly is called and all the Gauts are summoned to go there A large throne, big enough for two men to sit comfortably on, is placed in the midst of the assembly. Then the man who fills that seat is chosen king. It seems to me that you would amply fill that seat '

The brothers parted with affection, each wishing the other well. Thorir continued on his way until he reached Gautland. He came to a jarl, who received him well, and there Thorir spent the night Every man who saw Thorir

said that he might well become the king of the Gauts because of his size. They predicted that there would be few like him at the assembly.

When the time for the assembly arrived, the proceedings went as Frodi, his brother, had predicted they would. A judge was appointed to decide the matter truthfully. Many sat in the seat, but the judge declared none of them fit for the honour. Waiting until last, Thorir sat quickly in the chair, and the judge said, 'The seats fits you best, and you are selected to receive the kingship.'

Then the people of the land gave him the name of king. He was called King Thorir Hound's Foot, and there are great sagas about him. He was well liked and he fought many battles, in which he was most often victorious. Thorir now stayed in his own kingdom for a time.

Bodvar's Vengeance

Bodvar remained at home with his mother, who loved him dearly. Of all men, he was the most accomplished and handsome, but as yet he had not met very many people. Once he asked his mother who his father was. She told him about his father's killing, giving her son all the information. She explained how Bjorn had fallen under the spell of his stepmother.

Bodvar said, 'We have wrongs to repay this witch.'

Then Bera told him how the queen had forced her to eat the bear's flesh, 'and the result can be seen in your brothers, Thorir Hound's Foot and Elk-Frodi.'

Bodvar said, 'I think Frodi ought to have felt more

bound to take vengeance on this cowardly witch for our father than to kill innocent men for their money and carry out other vile acts. Likewise, I think it is odd that Thorir went away without giving this ogress something to remember. So it seems to me that I should punish her on our behalf.'

Bera replied, 'Arrange it so that she is not able to use her black arts to injure you.'

He said that it would be so arranged.

Bera and Bodvar now went to see the king. Following Bodvar's advice, Bera explained to the king how everything had come about. She showed him the ring, which she had taken from under the shoulder of the beast, explaining that Bjorn, his son, had owned it.

The king agreed that without a doubt he recognized the ring, 'I suspected that the queen was behind the strange events that have happened here, but for the sake of my love for her I have let matters remain quiet.'

Bodvar said, 'Send her away now or else we will take vengeance on her.'

The king said that he wished to compensate Bodvar for his loss with as much treasure as he might want, but that matters were to remain quiet, as they had been before. He would give Bodvar a position of command, the title of jarl straightaway and, after his days were over, the kingdom, if only no harm were done to her.

Bodvar replied that he did not want to be king, rather he said that he wanted to be with the king and to serve him. 'You are so trapped by this monster that you hardly have the wits to run your rightful kingdom, and from now on she will never thrive in this place.'

Bodvar became so filled with fury that the king dared not stand in his way. Carrying a pouch in his hand, Bodvar went to the queen's chamber; the king and Bodvar's mother followed after him. Bodvar entered the chamber and turned to Queen Hvit. He placed the rough leather bag over her head. Then he pulled it down and tied it around her throat. He knocked her off her feet and with beatings and torments sent her to Hel, dragging her through every street.

Many or most of those who were within the hall thought this punishment was only half of what she deserved. The king, however, took it very badly, but there was nothing he could do about it. In this way Queen Hvit lost her miserable life.

Bodvar was eighteen years old when this happened. A little later King Hring took sick and died. Bodvar became the ruler of the kingdom, but he was content with this position for only a short while. Then he called an assembly of the men of the land. At that meeting he announced that he wanted to leave and that he was marrying his mother to the man named Valsleyt, a jarl already in the land. Bodvar took part in the wedding feast before riding away.

Bodvar and His Brothers

After the wedding Bodvar rode away alone. He took with him neither much gold or silver, nor other valuables. Yet he was well equipped with weapons and clothes and was riding on his good horse. Following his mother's

instructions, he first headed to the cave. The sword loosened as soon as he gripped the hilt. It was in this sword's nature that it could never be drawn without causing the death of a man and that it should not be laid under a man's head or rested on its hilt. Only three times in its owner's life could the weapon be urged to action. Thereafter it could never be drawn again by the same person, so difficult was its nature. All the brothers wanted to own so valuable a treasure.

Bodvar set out to find his brother Elk-Frodi. He made a sheath for the sword from some birch wood. There is nothing noteworthy to tell about his journey until he arrived late in the day at a large hall. Here Elk Frodi ruled. Bodvar led his horse into the stable, acting as though he had a right to everything that he wanted. Frodi came home in the evening, he glared at the newcomer. Bodvar did not react noticeably but remained quiet. The horses meanwhile started to go at each other, each trying to drive the other from the stall.

Frodi then said, 'Truly it is an aggressive man who dares to seat himself inside without my permission.'

Bodvar pulled the hood over his face and gave no reply. Elk-Frodi stood up. Then drawing his short sword, he struck downward, burying the weapon up to the hilt. He then did the same thing again, but Bodvar did not flinch. Raising his sword for the third time, Elk Frodi now turned aggressively on Bodvar. It seemed to Elk Frodi that the newcomer did not know the meaning of fear, and he intended to master him.

When Bodvar understood Frodi's intentions, he decided to wait no longer. Springing to his feet, he dashed

in under the other's arms Elk-Frodi had a powerful grip, and they found themselves locked in a hard struggle Then Bodvar's hood fell down.

Frodi, recognizing his brother, said, 'Welcome, kinsman We have wrestled far too long.'

'It has as yet done no damage,' said Bodvar.

Elk-Frodi replied, 'It would, however, be safer for you, kinsman, to stop fighting with me. Should we start fighting in earnest, holding nothing back, you would realize the difference in strength between us.'

Frodi invited him to remain there, offering him a half-share of everything But Bodvar declined He thought it wrong to kill people for their wealth, and so he prepared to leave.

Frodi accompanied Bodvar on his way. He told Bodvar that he had given quarter to many men, especially those who were small and weak. Bodvar, cheered up by his brother's remark, praised him, saying that in this he did well, and you should let most people go in peace, even if you find fault with them.'

Elk-Frodi answered, 'To me everything is ill given But for you, the choice is clear Go to King Hrolf All the foremost champions want to be with him His generosity, as well as his magnificence and courage, exceeds by far all other kings'.'

Then Frodi reached over and pushed Bodvar, saying, 'Kinsman, you are not as strong as you should be.' Frodi drew blood from his own calf, telling Bodvar to drink of it, and Bodvar did so.

Then Frodi shoved his brother for a second time, but Bodvar stood firm in his tracks You are now exceedingly

strong, kinsman,' said Frodi. 'I believe the drink has been of use to you. From now on, you will be ahead of most men in strength and prowess as well as in courage and nobility. This thought pleases me immensely.'

Next Frodi stamped on the stone that lay nearby. His leg sank into the rock up to the small nub on the back of the leg above the elk hoof. He said, 'I will come to this hoofprint every day in order to see what is in it. It will be earth if you have died of sickness, water if you have drowned, but blood if you have been killed by weapons. If it is the last, then I will avenge you, because I love you best of all men.'

With this they parted, and Bodvar went on his way. He arrived in Gautland, but King Thorir Hound's Foot was not at home. Bodvar and Thorir looked so much alike that the one could not be distinguished from the other, so people thought that Thorir had returned home. Bodvar was placed in the high seat and served in all ways as though he were the king. Since Thorir was married, Bodvar was put to bed with the queen.

But Bodvar would not get under the bed cover with her, which she thought strange because she truly believed him to be her husband. Bodvar told her everything, and she for her part kept the secret. So they continued in this way, talking together every night with a blanket separating them, until Thorir returned home. Then people realized who Bodvar was, and the brothers held a joyful reunion. Thorir said that he would have trusted no other man to lie so close to his queen.

Thorir invited Bodvar to stay with them, offering him half of all his movable property, but Bodvar said that he

did not want to do that. Thorir then suggested that Bodvar choose whatever he desired to take away with him, offering also to supply him with a troop of men. But again Bodvar refused.

Bodvar now rode out, and Thorir accompanied him for a way. The brothers parted in friendship, but also with unspoken misgivings. Nothing is said of Bodvar's travels until he arrived in Denmark and was only a short distance from Hleidargard.

One day a heavy rainstorm soaked Bodvar thoroughly. His horse, which he had ridden hard, was exhausted under him. The going was heavy since the ground had turned to mud. That night it grew very dark and the downpour continued steadily. Bodvar took no notice until his horse stumbled on a large obstacle. He dismounted and looked around, soon realizing that he had come upon some sort of house. He found the door, knocked on it and a man came out of the house. Bodvar asked for shelter for the night. The farmer answered that he would not send him away in the dead of night, especially as he was a stranger. From what the farmer could see, the stranger seemed to be very imposing. Bodvar stayed there overnight and was treated hospitably. He asked many questions about the exploits of King Hrolf and his champions, inquiring also about the distance to Hleidargard.

'It is now a very short distance,' said the farmer. 'Do you intend to go there?'

'Yes,' replied Bodvar, 'that is my intention.'

The farmer declared that it would be fitting for him to do so, 'because I see you are a large, powerful man,

and they think themselves great champions' And the old woman living there sobbed aloud, as she did whenever they mentioned King Hrolf and his champions at Hleidargard.

Bodvar asked, 'Why are you crying, you simple old woman?'

The old woman said, 'My husband and I have one son, who is named Hott. One day he went to the stronghold to amuse himself, but the king's men taunted him He could not stand up to such conduct, so the men took hold of him and stuck him into a pile of bones. It is their habit at mealtimes, when they are finished gnawing the meat from a bone, to throw it at him Sometimes, if the bone hits him, he is badly injured. Whether he is alive or dead I do not know But I ask this reward from you, in return for my hospitality, that you throw smaller bones at him rather than larger ones; that is, if he is not already dead '

Bodvar answered, 'I will do as you request, but I do not think it is warriorlike to strike people with bones or to harm children or men of small account.'

'Then you will do well,' said the old woman, 'because your hand seems to be strong, and I know for certain that, if you chose not to hold back, an opponent would have no refuge from your blows.'

Bodvar continued on his way to Hleidargard. After arriving at the king's royal residence, he immediately stabled his horse in the stall with the king's best mounts without asking anyone's permission. Then he entered the hall, where there were only a few men. He sat down near the entrance, and after he had been there for a short time, he heard a noise coming from somewhere in the

corner. Bodvar looked in that direction and saw a man's hand emerging from a huge pile of bones lying there. The hand was very black.

Bodvar walked over to the corner and asked who was in the bone pile. He was answered, though timidly, 'My name is Hott, kind sir.'

'Why are you here?' asked Bodvar. 'Or what are you doing?'

Hott's reply was, 'I am making myself a shield wall, kind sir.'

'You and your shield wall are pathetic,' said Bodvar. He grabbed hold of the man and yanked him out of the bone pile.

Hott screamed loudly and then said, 'You are acting as though you want me dead, since I had prepared my defences so well. Now you have broken my shield wall into pieces even though I had built it so high around me that it protected me against all your blows. No blow has reached me now for some time, yet the wall was not as complete as I had intended it to be.'

Bodvar said, 'You will no longer build your shield wall.'

Hott replied, 'Are you going to kill me now, kind sir?'

Bodvar, telling Hott to be quiet, picked him up and carried him from the hall to a nearby lake. Few paid attention to this. Bodvar washed Hott completely and then returned to the same place on the bench where he had sat previously. He led Hott there and sat him down beside himself. Hott was so scared that all his limbs and joints trembled, although he seemed to understand that this man wanted to help him.

Later in the evening men crowded into the hall. Hrolf's champions saw that Hott had been seated on one of the benches, and it seemed to them that the man who had undertaken to do that was indeed brave. Hott cast a fearful glance in the direction of his old acquaintances, for he had received only harm from them. Afraid for his life, he tried to get back to his bone pile, but Bodvar held on to Hott and he was unable to get away. Hott thought that, if he could manage to get to the heap of bones, he would not be so exposed to the men's blows.

The king's men now took up their old habits. At first they threw small bones across the floor at Bodvar and Hott. Bodvar acted as if he saw nothing. Hott was so frightened that he took neither food nor drink, expecting to be struck at any moment.

Then Hott said to Bodvar, 'Kind sir, here comes a large knuckle bone, which is intended to do us much harm.'

Bodvar told Hott to be quiet. He cupped his hand and caught the knuckle bone, which included the attached leg bone. Bodvar threw the knuckle back, and it smashed with such force into the man who had thrown it that he was killed. The king's men were struck with fear.

King Hrolf and his champions up in the fortress were now told that an imposing man had arrived in the hall and had killed one of the king's retainers. The other retainers wanted to have the man put to death.

The king asked whether his follower had been killed without cause.

'Almost,' they said.

Then the full truth came out. King Hrolf said that by no means should this man be killed: 'It is a bad habit that you have adopted, throwing bones at innocent men. It brings dishonour to me and shame to you. I have repeatedly spoken to you about this matter, but you have paid no attention. I suspect that this man, whom you have now attacked, is no weakling. Summon him to me, so that I can find out who he is.'

Bodvar went before the king and greeted him artfully. The king asked for his name.

'Your retainers call me Hott's protector, but my name is Bodvar.'

The king said, 'What compensation are you prepared to offer me for my man?'

Bodvar replied, 'He got what he deserved.'

The king said, 'Do you want to be my man and occupy his place?'

Bodvar answered, 'I will not refuse to become your man, but Hott and I will not, as matters stand, be separated. We will both sit closer to you on the benches than that man did, or else we both leave.'

The king said, 'I see no honour in him, but I will not begrudge him food.'

Bodvar now chose a seat that pleased him, not bothering to sit in the place the other man had occupied. At one point he pulled three men up out of their seats, and then he and Hott sat down in their places. They had now moved much farther into the hall than earlier. Men thought Bodvar difficult to deal with, and there was strong resentment against him.

As Yuletime drew near, gloom settled over the men.

Bodvar asked Hott what caused their dejection. Hott told him that a huge, monstrous beast had come there the past two winters. 'The creature has wings on its back and it usually flies. For two autumns now it has come here, causing much damage. No weapon can bite into it, and the king's champions, even the greatest among them, do not return home.'

Bodvar said, 'The hall is not so well manned as I had thought, if one animal alone could destroy the king's lands and his livestock.'

Hott said, 'It is not an animal, rather it is the greatest of trolls.'

Then came Yule eve, and the king said, 'It is my wish that tonight men remain calm, making no noise, and I forbid any of my men to put themselves in danger with the beast. The livestock will be left to their fate, because I do not want to lose any of my men.' Everyone faithfully promised the king to do as he asked.

Bodvar stole away in the night and took Hott with him. Hott went only after being forced to do so, declaring that he was being steered straight toward death. Bodvar said, 'Things will turn out for the better.'

They now left the hall behind them, with Bodvar carrying Hott because he was so frightened. They saw the creature, and immediately Hott started to scream as loudly as he could, crying that the beast would swallow him. Bodvar told the dog to be quiet and threw him down on the moor. There he lay, not a little scared, at the same time not daring to go home.

Bodvar now went against the beast. He was hampered by his sword, which, as he tried to draw it, stuck fast in

its scabbard. Determined, Bodvar urged the sword out until the scabbard squeaked. Then he grasped the scabbard and the sword came out of the sheath Immediately he thrust it up under the beast's shoulder, striking so hard that the blade reached quickly into the heart. Then the beast fell dead to the ground.

After this encounter Bodvar went to the place where Hott was lying. He picked up Hott and carried him to where the beast lay dead. Hott was trembling violently.

Bodvar said, 'Now you will drink the beast's blood.' For a while Hott was unwilling, although certainly he dared do nothing else. Bodvar made him drink two large mouthfuls as well as eat some of the beast's heart. After that Bodvar seized Hott, and they fought each other for a long time.

Bodvar said, 'You have now become remarkably strong, and I expect that from this day forward you will have no fear of King Hrolf's retainers.'

Hott replied, 'From now on, I will fear neither them nor you.'

'Then, Hott, my friend,' said Bodvar, 'things have turned out well. Let us now go back to the beast, raising him up in such a way that men will think the creature must be alive.'

They did just that and afterward went home They kept these events to themselves, and so no one knew what they had done.

In the morning, the king asked what was known about the beast, whether it had visited them in the night. He was told that all the livestock were safe in the pens, unharmed. The king ordered men to inquire if there were any

indications that the beast had visited them. The guards went out but quickly returned. They told the king that the beast was coming toward them, furiously advancing on the stronghold. The king ordered his retainers to be valiant. Each was to do his best according to his courage, so that they might overcome this monster. Obeying the king's command, the men prepared themselves.

The king looked toward the beast, saying finally, 'I see no movement in it, but which one of you will now seize the opportunity to go against it?'

Bodvar said, 'That would likely satisfy the curiosity of the bravest man. Hott, my friend, throw off the slander that men have laid on you, claiming that you have neither spirit nor courage. Go and kill the beast. You can see that no one else is too eager to do so.'

'Right,' said Hott, 'I will set myself to that task.'

The king said, 'I do not know where your courage has come from, Hott, but much has changed about you in a short time.'

Hott said, 'For this task, give me the sword Golden Hilt, the one that you are holding, and then I will either kill the beast or find my own death.'

King Hrolf said, 'That sword is not to be carried except by a man who is both strong in body and noble in spirit.'

Hott replied, 'Assume, Sire, that I am made from such a mould.'

The king retorted, 'How can one tell? Perhaps more has changed about you than is evident. Few would think that you are the same person. Take the sword, for it will serve you well if my instincts about you turn out to be correct.'

Then Hott went boldly against the beast, thrusting at it as soon as he was within striking distance. The beast fell down dead.

Bodvar said, 'See, Sire, what he has now accomplished.'

The king answered, 'Certainly he has changed greatly, but Hott alone did not kill the beast; rather you did it.'

Bodvar said, 'That may be.'

The king said, 'I knew when you came here that few would be your equal, but it seems to me that your finest achievement is that you have made Hott into another champion. He was previously thought to be a man in whom there was little probability of much luck. I do not want him called Hott any longer, instead, from now on he will be called Hjalti. You will now be called after the sword Golden Hilt.'

And here ends this tale of Bodvar and his brothers.

[. . .]

Queen Skuld Incites King Hjorvard

A long time passed during which King Hrolf and his champions stayed peacefully in Denmark, and no one attacked them. All Hrolf's subject kings remained obedient. They paid him their tribute, as did Hjorvard, his brother-in-law.

It happened that Queen Skuld spoke with her husband King Hjorvard. Sighing heavily, she said, 'It suits me little that we should pay tribute to King Hrolf and be

forced to be his underlings. You must not remain his subject.'

Hjorvard answered, 'It suits us best to suffer this indignity, as the others do, and to let everything remain quiet.'

'What a weakling you are,' she said, 'to accept whatever shame is handed to you.'

He replied, 'It is not possible to challenge King Hrolf, and no one dares raise a shield against him.'

'In this respect you are all so cowardly,' she said. 'There is no spirit in any of you, and so it will remain for those who take no risks. How will we know whether King Hrolf and his champions can be hurt unless they are put to the test? The times are changing,' she said, 'and I believe King Hrolf is a man without hope of victory. To my mind it does not seem outlandish to test if this assumption is true. Even if he is my kinsman, I will not spare him. He himself suspects that he will not gain the victory, and it is for this reason that he remains continually at home. I will now prepare a plan – one that might work – and I will spare no trouble in finding the proper way to force a showdown between us.

Skuld was a powerful sorceress. She came from elfin stock on her mother's side, and for this fact King Hrolf and his champions would pay.

'First, I will send men to King Hrolf, asking him to relieve me of the paying of tribute for the next three years. Instead I will offer to pay him everything at once, according to his rights. I think this ruse will work, and if he accepts the idea, we need do nothing further.'

Messengers now went between them, doing as the

queen wished. When asked, King Hrolf agreed to the request concerning the tribute. Time passed.

Queen Skuld Attacks King Hrolf at Yule

Meanwhile Skuld assembled a troop of the best fighters as well as the worst rabble from neighbouring provinces. This treachery was concealed so that King Hrolf was completely unaware of it. Likewise the champions suspected nothing, because it was done with the most skilful magic and sorcery. Skuld, to overpower her brother King Hrolf, fashioned a spell of high potency, which summoned elves, norns and countless other vile creatures. No human power could withstand so strong a force.

Meanwhile, King Hrolf and his champions were happily revelling and amusing themselves in Hleidargard. With skill and courtesy they took part in all the games known to such men. Each of them had a mistress for his pleasure.

And now there is more to be told. When Hjorvard's and Skuld's forces were fully prepared, they set out for Hleidargard, arriving in uncountable numbers just at Yule. King Hrolf had commanded lavish preparations for the feast, and his men sat drinking deeply that Yule evening. Outside the stronghold, Hjorvard and Skuld pitched their tents, which were large and long and strangely outfitted. There were many wagons, all filled with weapons and armour. King Hrolf paid no attention to the new arrivals. His thoughts were more on his generosity, magnificence and courage. He dwelt on the

valour that lay in his heart, pondering how to provide for all his guests in a way that would allow his fame to travel farthest. He already had everything that might enhance the honour of a worldly king.

It is not mentioned that King Hrolf and his champions worshipped the old gods at any time. Rather, they put their trust in their own might and main. The holy faith, at that time, had not been proclaimed here in the northern lands and, for this reason, those who lived in the north had little knowledge of their Creator.

Next there is this to tell, Hjalti the Magnanimous went to the house of his mistress. It was then that he saw clearly that peace was not being prepared in the tents of Hjorvard and Skuld. But Hjalti raised no alarm, and his expression showed no concern. He lay now with his mistress, she was the fairest of women. After he had been there for a while, he sprang to his feet and said, 'Which do you think better, two twenty-two-year-olds or one eighty-year-old man?'

She answered, 'I think two twenty-two-year-olds better than men of eighty.'

'You will pay for these words, you whore,' said Hjalti, and he went up to her and bit off her nose. 'You can blame me if anyone fights over you, but I expect that from now on, most will think you scarcely a treasure.'

'You treat me miserably,' she said, 'and it is undeserved.'

'Everyone,' said Hjalti, 'can be fooled by scheming.'

Hjalti then reached for his weapons, because he saw that the area around the stronghold was packed with men in armour, and that war standards had been raised.

Realizing that battle was at hand, he made his way to the hall where King Hrolf sat with his champions

'Wake up, my lord king,' said Hjalti. 'War has come into our courtyard. The need is more for fighting than for fondling women. The gold in the hall will, I think, be little increased by the tribute from your sister Skuld She has the fierceness of the Skoldungs, and I can tell you that it is no small army, with swords drawn and other weapons ready, which circles the fortress. King Hjorvard has not come on a friendly errand, nor has he any intention from now on of seeking your permission to rule his own kingdom.

'Now is the time,' said Hjalti, 'for us to lead the forces of our king, that man who denies us nothing. Let us fulfil our solemn vows that we will defend the king who has become the most famous in all the northern lands. Let it be heard in every land how we repaid him for the weapons, armour and many other generous acts, because what faces us will not be a minor undertaking. We have for a long time, despite many clear indications, ignored what was coming. Now I have reason to suspect that momentous events, of the type that will long be remembered, are about to take place. Some might say that I perhaps speak from fear, but it may be that King Hrolf drinks for the last time with his champions and his retainers.

'Rise now, all you champions,' said Hjalti, 'and be quick about parting from your mistresses. Other matters are staring you in the face. Prepare yourselves for what is about to happen. Up, all you champions! Everyone must arm himself at once.'

Then Hromund the Hard leapt up, followed by Hrolf the Swift Handed, Svipdag and Beygad, and Hvitserk the Bold Haklang was the sixth, Hardrefil the seventh, Haki the Valiant the eighth, Vott the Arrogant the ninth and Storolf was the name of the tenth Hjalti the Magnanimous was the eleventh and Bodvar Bjarki was the twelfth. Bodvar was so named because he drove out King Hrolf's bullying and unjust berserkers. Some he killed and none of them was successful against him In comparison to him, the berserkers, when put to the test, were like children. Nevertheless, they always considered themselves superior, and they continually plotted against Bodvar.

Bodvar Bjarki immediately stood up. He put on his war gear and said that King Hrolf now badly needed brave men: 'Heart and courage will be required of all those who choose to stand alongside King Hrolf, rather than to hide behind him.'

Then King Hrolf sprang to his feet. Showing not a trace of fear, he began to speak, 'Let us now down the finest drink that can be had. We do it before the battle, making us cheerful, and in this way we show what manner of men Hrolf's champions are. Let us strive only to make our bravery so superior that it will never be forgotten, because gathered here are the finest and most courageous champions from all the surrounding lands Tell Hjorvard and Skuld and their men that we will drink to our satisfaction before setting out to take the tribute.'

The king's orders were obeyed. Skuld answered, 'King Hrolf, my brother, is unlike all others, and the loss of

such men is a dreadful misfortune. Nevertheless, all now moves towards the same end.' So highly was King Hrolf regarded that he was praised by both friends and enemies.

The Great Battle

After drinking for a while, King Hrolf leapt up from the high seat, and all his champions followed his example. They left the pleasing drink and immediately went outside, everyone, that is, except Bodvar Bjarki. He was nowhere to be seen, a fact that greatly perplexed the others. They thought it possible that Bodvar had been captured or killed.

As soon as they went outside, a furious battle began. King Hrolf pushed forward with his standard. He was accompanied on both sides by his champions and by all the men of the stronghold. These latter were not few in number, even if they did not count for much in battle. Much was to be seen, massive blows struck helmets and mail coats while swords and spears flashed in the air. So numerous were the corpses that the ground was entirely covered with them.

Hjalti the Magnanimous said, 'Many mail coats are now slit open and many weapons are broken, helmets are smashed and brave knights are thrown from their mounts. Our king is in fine humour, for now he is as cheerful as when drinking deepest of his ale. He strikes alike with both hands, and in battle he is unlike other kings. To me he seems to have the strength of twelve

men, so many brave men has he killed. Now King Hjorvard can see that the sword Skofnung cuts; it rings loudly within their skulls.' The nature of Skofnung was such that it sang aloud when it struck bone.

The battle now became so fierce that nothing could withstand King Hrolf and his champions. Skofnung in hand, King Hrolf fought in a way that seemed a marvel. His courage made a great impression on King Hjorvard's army, whose men fell in heaps.

Hjorvard and his men saw a great bear advancing in front of King Hrolf's troop The bear was always beside the king, and it killed more men with its paw than any five of the king's champions did Blows and missiles glanced off the animal, as it used its weight to crush King Hjorvard's men and their horses. Between its teeth, it tore everything within reach, causing a palpable fear to spread through the ranks of King Hjorvard's army.

Hjalti looked around for his companion Bodvar but did not see him. He said to King Hrolf, 'What does it mean when Bodvar looks to his own safety and does not stand beside the king? We thought him such a champion, which indeed he has often proven himself to be.'

King Hrolf answered, 'Bodvar will be where he serves us best, if it is he who decides. Look to your own pride and prowess and do not reproach him, because not one of you is his equal. I do not hold this disparity against any of you, because you are all the most courageous of champions.'

Hjalti now ran back to the king's chamber, where he found Bodvar sitting idle Hjalti spoke, 'How long shall we wait for this most famous of men? It is a major

disgrace that you are not on your feet. You should be testing the strength of your arms, which are as strong as a bear's. Get up now, Bodvar Bjarki, my master, otherwise I will burn down the house and you in it. There is dishonour in this conduct for such a champion as you. While the king endangers his life for us, you lose the renown that you have for so long enjoyed.

Then Bodvar stood up. He sighed deeply and said, 'You need not try to frighten me, Hjalti, because I have not yet begun to be afraid, but now I am quite prepared to go. When I was young I fled from neither fire nor steel. Fire have I seldom tested, although the passage of steel weapons is something that I have endured. Until now, I have survived both. You can in truth say that I wish to fight at my utmost level. King Hrolf has always called me a champion in front of his men. I have also many other things to repay. First there is our bond by marriage and the twelve estates that he gave me; and then there are the many valuable gifts. I killed the berserker Agnar, a man of no lesser rank than that of a king, and that deed is well remembered.' Bodvar now recounted for Hjalti many of his remarkable feats, noting that he had killed many men. He asked Hjalti, therefore, to recognize that he went into battle without fear, adding, 'Although I think that in this current battle we are grappling with something far stranger than either of us has ever experienced. But you, Hjalti, by disturbing me here, have not been as helpful to the king as you think you have. It was nearly decided which side had gained the victory. You have acted more out of ignorance than out of enmity to the king. Among the king's champions

there is no one except you whom I would have permitted to call me out, as you have done. Anyone else, except for the king himself, I would have killed. Now events will run their course, turning out as they will, and no action on our part will affect the outcome. In truth, I can tell you that in many ways I can now offer the king far less support than before you woke me.'

Hjalti responded, 'It is clear that my concern is for you and King Hrolf. Yet it is difficult to make the right decision when events develop as they have.'

After Hjalti's challenge, Bodvar stood up and went out to the battle. The bear was gone from King Hrolf's force, and now the battle began to turn against the king. Queen Skuld, from where she sat in her black tent on the witch's scaffold, had been unable to work any magic while the bear was in King Hrolf's ranks.

The situation then changed as much as when dark night follows a bright day. King Hrolf's men now saw a hideous boar advancing from King Hjorvard's force. In size it appeared to be no smaller than a three year old bull. Its colour was wolf-grey. An arrow shot out from each of its bristles and, in a monstrous way, it mowed down King Hrolf's retainers in droves.

Hewing with both hands, Bodvar Bjarki moved forcefully around. He thought of nothing else but to cause as much damage as possible before he fell. Men fell dead across each other in front of him, until both his shoulders were covered with blood. Corpses were heaped high all around him, and he behaved as though overcome with madness. However many of Hjorvard's and Skuld's men he and Hrolf's champions killed, their enemies' ranks,

remarkably, never diminished. It was as though Hrolf's men were having no effect, and they thought they had never come upon so strange an occurrence.

Bodvar said, 'Deep are the ranks of Skuld's army. I suspect that the dead are wandering about. They rise up again to fight against us, and it becomes difficult to fight with ghosts. As many limbs as we cleave, shields as we split, helmets and mail coats as we hew apart, and war leaders we cut down, the encounters with the dead are the grimmest. We lack the strength to combat such opponents. But where is that champion of King Hrolf who most questioned my courage and, until I answered him, repeatedly challenged me to enter the fight? I do not see him now, and it is not often that I criticize others.'

Then Hjalti said, 'You speak truthfully, and you are not a man to slander others. Here stands the man named Hjalti, but I still have some work to do. There is not much distance between us, and I could use the support of good men, foster brother, because all my armour has been hacked off me. Even though I believe that I am fighting to my limit, I am no longer able to avenge all the blows I have received. But now we must hold nothing back, if we are to be guests this evening in Valhalla. Certainly we have never come up against a marvel such as we now face, although we have long been forewarned about the events now occurring.'

Bodvar said, 'Listen to my words. I have fought in twelve pitched battles. Always I have been called fearless and have never given way to a berserker. It was I who encouraged King Hrolf to seek out King Adils in his

home. We were met with deceit, but that was nothing compared to this foulness. My heart is now so gripped by these events that my eagerness to continue the fight has diminished. A short while ago, in the earlier clash, I was up against King Hjorvard. We were face to face, and neither of us threw insults at the other, although we exchanged blows for a time. He gave me a blow that I found heavy, while I, for my part, hacked off a hand and a foot. I landed another blow on his shoulder, slicing him down his side, for the length of his spine. His reaction was not even to sigh. It was as if he dozed for a time, and I thought him dead. Few men like him are to be found, for he fought afterward no less boldly than before, and I cannot say what it is that is driving him. Assembled here against us are many men, rich and powerful, pouring in from all directions, so that there is no defence. I do not recognize Odin among them, although I strongly suspect that this foul and unfaithful son of the evil one will be hovering in the background and causing us harm. If someone would only point him out to me I would squeeze him like a detestable puny mouse. That vile, poisonous creature would be shamelessly treated if I could just get my hands on him. Who would not have bitterness in his heart if he saw his liege lord as ill treated as we now see ours?'

Hjalti answered, 'It is not possible to bend fate, nor can one stand against nature.' At this point they ceased their talk.

The Death of King Hrolf Kraki

King Hrolf defended himself well, fighting resolutely and with more courage than has been told of any man. He was attacked relentlessly, and a select company of King Hjorvard's and Skuld's warriors formed a ring around him. Skuld now entered into the fray. She fiercely incited her rabble to attack King Hrolf, because she saw that the champions were no longer close beside him. Bodvar Bjarki sorely grieved that he was unable to assist his lord. The other champions felt the same regret. All of them were now as willing to die with King Hrolf as they had been to live with him, when they were in the full vigour of their youth.

By now all of the king's bodyguard had fallen. Not one of them was left standing, and most of the champions were mortally wounded.

'And events turned out as expected,' said Master Galterus. 'Human strength cannot withstand such fiendish power, unless the strength of God is employed against it. That alone stood between you and victory, King Hrolf,' said the Master; 'you had no knowledge of your Creator.'

Such a storm of enchantments now descended upon them that the champions began to fall, one across the other. King Hrolf managed to emerge from behind the shield wall, but he was nearly dead from exhaustion. There is no need to draw out the tale. King Hrolf fell gloriously, together with all his champions. They made so much of a slaughter there that words alone are

inadequate to describe it. King Hjorvard and all his army fell, save only a few shirkers who, together with Skuld, were still on their feet.

Skuld took all of King Hrolf's realm under her power, but she ruled poorly and for only a short time. Elk Frodi set out to avenge his brother Bodvar Bjarki as he had promised to do. He was joined by King Thorir Hound's Foot, as is told in Elk-Frodi's tale. The brothers were supported by a strong contingent sent from the Swedish kingdom by Queen Yrsa, and men say that Vogg served as the commander. All of these forces sailed for Denmark, and Skuld was taken by surprise. They seized and held her in such a way that she was prevented from working any witchcraft. They killed all of her rabble and tortured her in different ways. The kingdoms returned to the rule of King Hrolf's daughters. When all this had been accomplished, everyone went home.

A burial mound was raised for King Hrolf, and the sword Skofnung was laid in the mound with him. A mound was raised for each of the champions, and they likewise were buried with their weapons.

And here ends the saga of King Hrolf Kraki and his champions.

The Prose Edda

Niflheim and Muspellsheim

Gangleri asked, 'What was the beginning, or how did things start? What was there before?'

High answered, 'As it says in *The Sibyl's Prophecy*:

> Early of ages
> when nothing was.
> There was neither sand nor sea
> nor cold waves
> The earth was not found
> nor the sky above.
> Ginnungagap was there,
> but grass, nowhere.'

Next Just as High said, 'Niflheim [Dark World] was made many ages before the earth was created, and at its centre is the spring called Hvergelmir [Roaring Kettle]. From there flow those rivers called Svol, Gunnthra, Fjorm, Fimbulthul, Slid and Hrid, Sylg and Ylg, Vid and Leiptr. Also there is Gjoll, which lies next to Helgrind [Gates of Hel].'

Then Third said, 'First, however, there was that world in the southern region which is called Muspell. It is bright and hot. That region flames and burns and is impassable

for foreigners and those who cannot claim it as their native land. Surt [Black One] is the name of he who waits there at the land's edge to defend it. He has a flaming sword, and when the end of the world comes, he will set off to battle and defeat all the gods, burning the whole world with fire. So it is said in *The Sibyl's Prophecy*:

> Surt comes from the south
> with the fiery destruction of branches
> The sun shines from the sword
> of the gods of the slain.
> Stone cliffs tumble
> and troll witches stumble.
> Men tread the Road to Hel
> as the sky splits apart.'

Ginnungagap and the Emergence of Ymir

Gangleri asked: 'How were things set up before the different families came into being and mankind increased?'

High replied, 'When those rivers, which are called Elivagar [Storm Waves], came so far from their source, the poisonous flow hardened like a slag of cinders running from a furnace, and became ice. When this ice began to solidify and no longer ran, poisonous drops spewed out and froze into icy rime [hoar frost]. Then layer by layer, the ice grew within Ginnungagap.'

Then Just-as-High said, 'That part of Ginnungagap, which reached into the northern regions, became filled

with thick ice and rime. Inside the gap there was mist and wind whipped rain But the southern part of Ginnun gagap grew light because of sparks and glowing embers flowing from Muspellsheim.'

Then Third spoke. 'Just as coldness and all things grim came from Niflheim, the regions bordering on Muspell were warm and bright, and Ginnungagap was as mild as a windless sky It thawed and dripped at the point where the icy rime and the warm winds met. There was a quickening in these flowing drops and life sprang up, taking its force from the power that sent the heat. The likeness of a man appeared and he was named Ymir. The frost giants call him Aurgelmir, and from him come the clans of the frost giants, as it says in *The Shorter Sibyl's Prophecy*:

> All the seeresses are
> from Vidolf,
> all the wizards
> from Vilmeid,
> but the sorcerers are
> from Svarthofdi
> and all the giants
> come from Ymir

'Here as the giant Vafthrudnir says:

> From where Aurgelmir first came,
> the wise giant,
> among sons of giants.

When poison from Elivagar
splashed out in drops
it grew until forming a giant,
from there all our clans
have come;
therefore they are all so cruel.'

Then Gangleri asked, 'How did the families grow from that point or how did it come about that others came into being? And do you believe that the one whom you were just talking about is a god?'

High answered, 'In no way do we accept him as a god. He was evil, as are all his descendants, we call them frost giants. It is said that as he slept he took to sweating. Then, from under his left arm grew a male and a female, while one of his legs got a son with the other. From here came the clans that are called the frost giants. The old frost giant, him we call Ymir.'

The Primeval Cow Audhumla, Ymir and the Birth of Odin

Gangleri asked, 'Where did Ymir live, and what did he live on?'

'Next it happened that as the icy rime dripped, the cow called Audhumla was formed. Four rivers of milk ran from her udders, and she nourished Ymir.

Then Gangleri asked, 'On what did the cow feed?'

High replied, 'She licked the blocks of ice, which were salty. As she licked these stones of icy rime the first day,

the hair of a man appeared in the blocks towards the evening. On the second day came the man's head, and on the third day, the whole man. He was called Burı, and he was beautiful, bıg and strong. He had a son called Bor, who took as his wife the woman called Bestla She was the daughter of Bolthorn the gıant, and they had three sons. One was called Odın, another Vili and the third Ve. It ıs my belıef that thıs Odın and his brothers are the rulers of heaven and earth. We know that ıs hıs name, and ıt ıs what we call the one whom we know to be the greatest and the most renowned, and you too can easily call him that.'

Bergelmir and the Appearance of the Second Race of Frost Giants

Then Gangleri asked, 'How did they get on together? Who among them was the most powerful?'

The sons of Bor killed the gıant Ymir,' answered High. 'When he fell, so much blood gushed from his wounds that with ıt they drowned all the race of the frost giants except for one who escaped with hıs household. The gıants call that one Bergelmır. He, together with his wife, climbed up on to his wooden box, and there they kept themselves safe. From them come the races of the frost giants, as is said here:

> Countless winters
> before the earth was created
> back then Bergelmir was born;

that is the first I remember
when the wise giant
was placed on the box.'

The World is Created from Ymir's Body

Gangleri answered, 'What did Bor's sons do next, if you believe they are gods?'

High said, 'It is no small matter to be told. They took Ymir and they moved him into the middle of Ginnungagap and made from him the world. From his blood they made the sea and the lakes. The earth was fashioned from the flesh, and mountain cliffs from the bones. They made stones and gravel from the teeth, the molars and those bones that were broken.'

Then Just-as-High said, 'With the blood that gushed freely from the wounds, they made the sea, and by fashioning that sea around, they belted and fastened the earth. Most men would think it impossible to cross over this water.'

Then Third added: 'They also took his skull and from it made the sky. They raised it over the earth and under each of the four corners they placed a dwarf. These are called East, West, North and South. Then they took the embers and sparks shooting out from Muspellsheim and flying randomly. These they placed in the middle of the Ginnung Sky, both above and below, to light up heaven and earth. They fixed places for all these burning elements. Some were placed up in the heavens, whereas

for others, which had moved about under the heavens, they found places and established their courses. It is said in the old sources that, from then on, times of day were differentiated and the course of years was set. So it is said in *The Sibyl's Prophecy*:

> Sun did not know
> where she had her home.
> Moon did not know
> what strength he had
> The stars did not know
> where their places were.

'This was before the earth was created,' Third added.

Then Gangleri said, 'I hear of great happenings. It was wondrous work and skilfully done, but how was the earth set in order?'

Then High answered. 'It is circular around the edge and surrounding it lies the deep sea. On these ocean coasts, the sons of Bor gave land to the clans of the giants to live on. But further inland they built a fortress wall around the world to protect against the hostility of the giants. As material for the wall, they used the eyelashes of the giant Ymir and called this stronghold Midgard [Middle Earth]. They took his brain, threw it up into the air, and from it they made the clouds. As is said here.

> From Ymir's flesh
> was the earth created,
> from the bloody sweat, the sea,

cliffs from bones,
trees from hair,
and from the head, the heavens;

And from his eyelashes
the gentle gods made
Midgard for the sons of men;
and from his brains
all the oppressive
clouds were formed.'

Men are Created and Asgard is Built. The All Father Sees Everything

Then Gangleri said, 'It seems to me that they accomplished great things when the earth and the sky were made, the sun and the moon set in their places and the days divided. But the people who inhabit the world, where did they come from?'

Then High answered, 'The sons of Bor were once walking along the seashore and found two trees. They lifted the logs and from them created people. The first son gave them breath and life; the second, intelligence and movement; the third, form, speech, hearing and sight. They [Bor's sons] gave them clothing and names. The man was called Ask [Ash Tree] and the woman, Embla [Elm or Vine]. From them came mankind and they were given a home behind Midgard's wall.'

High said: 'Next they made a stronghold for themselves in the middle of the world, and it was called

Asgard. We call it Troy. There the gods lived together with their kinsmen, and as a result many events and happenings took place both on the earth and in the sky One place there is called Hlidskjalf [Watchtower]. When Odin sat in its high seat, he could see through all worlds and into all men's doings. Moreover, he understood everything he saw. His wife was called Frigg, Fjorgyn's daughter, and from this family has come the kindred we call the family of the Æsir. They lived in Old Asgard and the realms that belong to it, each member of this family is divine. For these reasons he can be referred to as All Father, since he is the father of all the gods and men and of everything that has been accomplished by his power. Earth was his daughter and his wife. With her he had his first son, and this is Asa Thor [Thor of the Æsir]. He has strength and might, and because of this, he defeats all living creatures.'

[. .]

The Ash Yggdrasil, the Norns and the Three Wells

Then Gangleri said, 'Where is the central or holy place of the gods?'

High answered, 'It is at the ash Yggdrasil. There each day the gods hold their courts '

Then Gangleri asked, 'What is there to tell about that place?'

Then Just as High said, 'The ash is the largest and the best of all trees Its branches spread themselves over

all the world, and it stands over the sky. Three roots support the tree and they are spread very far apart One is among the Æsir. A second is among the frost giants where Ginnungagap once was. The third reaches down to Niflheim, and under this root is the well Hvergelmir; but Nidhogg [Hateful Striker] gnaws at this root from below.

'Under the root that goes to the frost giants is the Well of Mimir. Wisdom and intelligence are hidden there, and Mimir is the name of the well's owner. He is full of wisdom because he drinks of the well from the Gjallar horn All-Father went there and asked for one drink from the well, but he did not get this until he gave one of his eyes as a pledge. As it says in *The Sibyl's Prophecy*:

> Odin, I know all,
> where you hid the eye
> in that famous
> Well of Mimir.
> Each morning
> Mimir drinks mead
> from Val-Father's pledge.
> Do you know now or what?

'The third root of the ash is in heaven, and under that root is the very holy well called the Well of Urd. There the gods have their place of judgment. Every day the Æsir ride up over Bifrost, which is also called Asbru [Bridge of the Æsir]. The horses of the Æsir are named as follows: Sleipnir [Fast Traveller] is the best; Odin owns him, and he has eight legs The second is Glad, the third

Gyllir, the fourth Glaer, the fifth Skeidbrimir, the sixth Silfrtopp, the seventh Sinir, the eighth Gils, the ninth Falhofnir, the tenth Gulltopp and the eleventh is Lettfeti Baldr's horse was burned with him. Thor, however, walks to the court; wading those rivers named as follows:

> Kormt and Ormt
> and the two Kerlaugs,
> through these Thor will
> wade each day
> when he goes to judge
> at the ash Yggdrasil,
> because the bridge of the Æsir
> burns with fire –
> holy waters seethe.'

Then Gangleri said, 'Does fire burn over Bifrost?'

High replied. 'The red you see in the rainbow is the burning fire. The frost giants and the mountain giants would scale heaven if Bifrost could be travelled by all who wanted to do so There are many beautiful places in heaven and everything is divinely protected A handsome hall stands under the ash beside the well. Out of this hall come three maidens, who are called Urd [Fate], Verdandi [Becoming] and Skuld [Obligation]. These maidens shape men's lives. We call them the norns. There are yet more norns, those who come to each person at birth to decide the length of one's life, and these are related to the gods. Others are descended from the elves, and a third group comes from the dwarves, as is said here:

Born of very different parents
I believe the norns are,
they do not share kinship.
Some are of the Æsir,
Some are of the elves,
Some are the daughters of Dvalin.'

Then Gangleri said, 'If the norns decide the fates of men, then they do so in a terribly uneven manner. Some people enjoy a good and prosperous life, whereas others have little wealth or renown Some have a long life, but others, a short one.'

High said· 'The good norns, the ones who are well born, shape a good life. When people experience mis fortune, it is the bad norns who are responsible '

[. . .]

Odin the All-Father

Then Gangleri said, 'Which Æsir ought men to believe in?'

High answered, 'There are twelve Æsir whose nature is divine.'

Then Just as High added: 'The goddesses are no less sacred, nor are they less powerful.'

Then Third said, 'Odin is the highest and oldest of the gods. He rules in all matters, and, although the other gods are powerful, all serve him as children do their father. Frigg is his wife She knows the fates of men, even though

she pronounces no prophecies. So it is said here, when Odin himself spoke with one of the Æsir called Loki:

"You are raving, Loki,
and out of your mind,
why, Loki, do you not stop?
Frigg knows,
I believe, the fate of all,
though she herself says nothing."

'Odin is called All Father, because he is the father of all the gods. He is also called Father of the Slain [Val Father], because all who fall in battle are his adopted sons. With them he mans Valhalla and Vingolf, and they are known as the Einherjar. He is also called Hanga-God [God of the Hanged], Hapta God [God of Prisoners] and Farma-God [God of Cargoes], and he named himself in many other ways on his visit to King Geirrod:

"I call myself Grim
and Gangleri,
Herjan, Hjalmberi,
Thekk, Thrid,
Thunn, Unn,
Helblindi, Har,
Sann, Svipal,
Sanngetal,
Herteit, Hnikar,
Bileyg, Baleyg,
Bolverk, Fjolnir,
Grimnir, Glapsvid, Fjolsvid,

Sidhott, Sidskegg,
Sig-Father, Hnikud,
All Father, Atrid, Farmatyr,
Oski, Omi,
Jafnhar, Blindi,
Gondlir, Harbard,
Svidur, Svidrir,
Jalk, Kjalar, Vidur,
Thror, Ygg, Thund,
Vak, Skilfing,
Vafud, Hroptatyr,
Gaut, Veratyr."'

Then Gangleri said, 'You have given him a large number of names. Truly, it would be a mark of great learning to be able to relate all the events that lie behind each of these names.'

Then High said, 'To go carefully through all of that requires much wisdom. Nevertheless, it can quickly be said that most names were given, because, with all the different branches of languages in the world, each of the peoples needed to change his name to their own tongue to worship and to pray. But some names derive from events that took place on his travels. They have formed into tales, and you will never be called a wise man if you are unable to recount these great events.'

Thor

Then Gangleri said, 'What are the names of the other Æsir? How do they occupy themselves? What have they done of importance?'

High replied: 'Thor is the foremost among them. Called Thor of the Æsir [Asa-Thor] and Thor the Charioteer [Oku Thor], he is the strongest of all gods and men. He rules at the place called Thrudvangar [Plains of Strength], and his hall is called Bilskirnir. There are five hundred and forty living spaces in the hall, and it is the largest building that men have erected. So it says in *The Lay of Grimnir*:

> Five hundred rooms
> and forty more are found,
> I believe when counted in Bilskirnir.
> Of those residences
> whose roofs I recognize,
> my son's I know is largest.

'Thor has two male goats called Tanngniost [Tooth Gnasher] and Tanngrisnir [Snarl Tooth]. He also owns the chariot that they draw, and for this reason he is called Thor the Charioteer. He, too, has three choice possessions. One is the hammer Mjollnir. Frost giants and mountain giants recognize it when it is raised in the air, which is not surprising as it has cracked many a skull among their fathers and kinsmen. His second great treasure is his Megingjard [Belt of Strength]. When he

buckles it on, his divine strength doubles. His third possession, the gloves of iron, are also a great treasure. He cannot be without these when he grips the hammer's shaft. No one is so wise that he can recount all of Thor's important deeds. I myself can tell you so many significant tales about him that hours would pass before I have said all I know."

[. . .]

Njord and Skadi

"The third god is named Njord. He lives in heaven at the place called Noatun [Enclosure for Ships]. He rules over the movement of the winds, and he can calm sea and fire. One invokes him in seafaring and fishing. He is so rich and prosperous that he can grant wealth in lands or valuables to those who ask for his aid. Njord is not of the Æsir family. He was brought up in Vanaheim, but the Vanir sent him as a hostage to the gods. In return they took as a hostage from the Æsir the one called Hoenir, and his exchange contributed to the peace between the gods and the Vanir.

"Njord has a wife called Skadi, the daughter of Thjazi the giant. Skadi wanted to live in the home that her father had owned up in the mountains at Thrymheim [Thunder Home]. But Njord wanted to be near the sea. They came to an agreement that they would stay nine nights in Thrymheim, and the next three nights at

Noatun. But when Njord returned to Noatun from the mountains, he said:

> "Hateful for me are the mountains,
> I was not long there,
> only nine nights.
> The howling of wolves
> sounded ugly to me
> after the song of swans."

'Then Skadi said this:

> "Sleep I could not
> on the sea beds
> for the screeching of the bird.
> That gull wakes me
> when from the wide sea
> he comes each morning."

'Then Skadi went up to the mountains and lived in Thrymheim. She travels much on skis, carries a bow and shoots wild animals She is called the ski god or the ski lady, as is said:

> Thrymheim it is called
> where Thjazi lived,
> the mighty giant.
> But now Skadi,
> pure bride of gods,
> lives in her father's old house.

[.]

Loki

'Also counted among the Æsir is one whom some call Slanderer of the Gods, the Source of Deceit, and the Disgrace of All Gods and Men. Named Loki or Lopt, he is the son of the giant Farbauti. His mother is named Laufey or Nal, and his brothers are Byleist and Helblindi. Loki is pleasing, even beautiful to look at, but his nature is evil and he is undependable More than others, he has the kind of wisdom known as cunning, and is treacherous in all matters. He constantly places the gods in difficulties and often solves their problems with guile. His wife is Sigyn and their son is Nari or Narfi.'

[. . .]

Thor and Loki Begin Their Journey to Giant Land

Then Gangleri said, 'Skidbladnir is a fine ship, and powerful magic must be called upon before something like it is crafted. Tell me, has Thor never been in a situation where he encountered so much strength and power that he was overwhelmed by might or magic superior to his own?'

High replied, 'I expect that there are few others who could answer your question, even though many situations have seemed difficult to Thor. Although some things, because of their power or their strength, have prevented Thor from being victorious, there is no need

to tell about them, not least because everybody ought to keep in mind that there are so many examples where Thor is the mightiest.'

Then Gangleri said, 'It seems to me that this time I have asked something that no one can answer.'

Just as High replied, 'We have heard reports that seem unreliable to us, yet here, close by, sits the man who can give a true account. You can trust what he says because he has never spoken falsely, and he will not start now.'

Then Gangleri responded: 'I will stand here and listen for a solution. Otherwise I call you beaten, because you are unable to answer my question.'

Third then spoke, 'It is obvious that he wants to know these tales, even though we take no pleasure in telling them. You, however, must now keep quiet.

'It started when Thor the Charioteer was travelling with his goats, accompanied by the god called Loki. Towards dusk they came to the house of a farmer and arranged lodging for the night In the evening Thor took his goats and slaughtered them both. They were then flayed and carried to the pot. After they had been cooked, Thor and his companions sat down to their evening meal. Thor invited the farmer and his wife and children to join him. The farmer's son was named Thjalfi and his daughter was Roskva. Next Thor spread out the goat-skins away from the fire and said that the farmer and his household should throw the bones on to the skins. Thjalfi, the farmer's son, took the thigh bone of one of the goats and, wedging in his knife, broke the bone to reach the marrow.

'Thor stayed the night, and just before dawn he got

up and dressed. He reached for his hammer Mjollnir and, lifting it up, consecrated the goatskins. The goats stood up, but one of them was lame in its hind leg. Thor noticed this and suspected that the farmer or one of his household had mistreated the goat's bones. Then he realized that its thigh bone was broken, and there is no need to make a long story of it. Everybody can imagine how frightened the farmer became as he watched Thor's eyebrows sink down low over his eyes. The small part of Thor's eyes that was visible was a sight that alone could have killed. Thor's hands clenched the shaft of the hammer until his knuckles whitened. As might be expected, the farmer and all his household began to wail. Begging for mercy, they offered in return everything they owned. When Thor saw their fear, his anger passed. Calming down, he took from them their children, Thjalfi and Roskva, as compensation. They became Thor's bond servants and follow him ever since.

Thor Encounters Skrymir in the Forest

'Thor left the goats behind and began the trip east into Giant Land, all the way to the sea. From there he continued out over the deep ocean. When he came to land he went ashore, and with him were Loki, Thjalfi and Roskva. After they had travelled a little while they came to a large forest. They continued walking that whole day until dark. Thjalfi, who was faster than anybody else, carried Thor's food bag. They were low on supplies.

'When it became dark they looked for a place to spend the night and came across a very large hall. At one end was a door as wide as the hall itself, where they sought quarters for the evening. But in the middle of the night there was a powerful earthquake, the ground heaved under them and the house shook. Thor stood up and called to his companions. They searched and found a side room on the right, towards the middle of the hall, and they went in. Thor placed himself in the doorway, and the others, who were scared, stayed behind him further inside. Thor held the hammer by its handle, intending to defend himself. Then they heard a loud noise and a roaring din.

'At sunrise, Thor went outside and saw a man lying in the forest a short distance from him. The man snored heavily as he slept, and he was not little. Thor then thought he understood the noise he had heard during the night. He put on his belt of strength, and divine power began to swell in him. But just at that moment the man awoke and quickly stood up. It is said that for once Thor was too startled to strike with the hammer. Instead he asked the man his name, and the other called himself Skrymir.

'"And I do not need," he said, "to ask your name. I know you are Thor of the Æsir. But, have you dragged away my glove?"

'Skrymir then reached out and picked up his glove. Thor now saw that during the night he had mistaken this glove for a hall. As for the side room, that was the glove's thumb. Skrymir asked if Thor wanted to have his company on the journey, and Thor said yes. Then

Skrymir took his food bag, untied it, and started to eat his breakfast. Thor and his companions did the same thing elsewhere. Skrymir next suggested that they pool their provisions, and Thor agreed. Skrymir tied together all their provisions in one bag and threw it over his shoulder. He went ahead during the day, taking rather large strides. Later, towards evening, Skrymir found them a place for the night under a great oak tree. Skrymir then told Thor that he wanted to lie down to sleep "but you take the food bag and prepare your evening meal."

'Next Skrymir fell asleep, snoring loudly, and Thor took the food bag, intending to untie it. There is this to tell, which may seem unbelievable, but Thor could not untie a single knot, nor was he able to loosen any of the straps. None was any looser than when he started. When Thor realized that his effort was being wasted, he became angry. Gripping the hammer Mjollnir with both hands, he strode with one foot out in front to where Skrymir lay and struck him on his head. But Skrymir awoke and asked whether a leaf from the tree had fallen on his head and whether they had eaten and were preparing to bed down. Thor replied that they were getting ready to go to sleep. They then moved to a place under another oak, and it can truly be said that it was not possible to sleep without fear.

'In the middle of the night Thor could hear that Skrymir was sleeping soundly, the forest thundering with the sound of his snoring. Thor stood up and went over to him. Quickly he raised the hammer and with a hard blow struck Skrymir at the midpoint of his skull. He felt

the hammer sink deeply into the head. But at that instant Skrymir awoke and said: "What now? Has some acorn fallen on my head? What's new with you, Thor?"

"Thor quickly moved back and said that he had just awakened, adding that it was the middle of the night and there was still time to sleep. Then Thor resolved that, if he could get close enough to strike a third blow, he would arrange matters so that this meeting would be their last one.

"Thor now lay awake watching for Skrymir to fall asleep. A little before dawn, hearing that Skrymir was sleeping, Thor stood up and, running towards Skrymir, raised his hammer and, with all his might, struck Skrymir on the temple. The hammer sank up to its shaft, but then Skrymir sat up, brushed off the side of his head, and asked:

"'"Are there some birds sitting in the tree above me? It seemed to me as I awoke that some leaves or twigs from the branches had fallen on my head. Are you awake, Thor? It is time to get up and get dressed. You don't have a long way to go to reach the stronghold, which is called Utgard. I have heard you whispering among yourselves that I am no small man, and you will see still larger men if you go to Utgard. Now I will give you some good advice: do not act arrogantly. The retainers of Utgarda-Loki will not tolerate bragging from such small fry as you. Your other choice is to turn back, and in my opinion that would be the best thing for you to do. But if you intend to continue, then head for the east. My path now leads me northward to those mountains that you can now see."

'Skrymir took the food bag and threw it on to his back. He turned sharply and headed north into the forest, leaving the others. In this parting, there is no report that the Æsir mentioned they were looking forward to meeting him again.

Thor Reaches the Stronghold of Utgarda-Loki

'Thor and his companions continued on their journey, travelling until midday. Then they saw a fortress standing on a plain, and it was so big that in order to see over it they had to bend their necks all the way back. They approached the fortress, but the front entrance gate was shut. Thor went to the gate and tried to open it, but after struggling to open the stronghold, they finally had to squeeze between the bars. Entering in this way, they saw a large hall and approached it. The door was open, and inside they saw many people sitting on two benches; most of them were rather large.

'They went before the king, Utgarda-Loki, and greeted him, but he took his time in noticing them. Then he said, grinning through his teeth: "News travels slowly from distant parts, but am I wrong in thinking that this little fellow is Thor the Charioteer? Surely there is more to you than meets the eye. Tell me, companions, in what skills do you think you are capable of competing? No one can stay here with us who does not have some skill or knowledge greater than other men."

'Then he who stood at the back of the group, the one called Loki, spoke up "I have a skill in which I am ready

to be tested. No one here in the hall will prove quicker than I at eating his food."

'Utgarda-Loki answered, "That would be an accomplishment, if you are up to it, and feats such as that will be put to the test." Next he called out to the end of the bench to the one who was called Logi [Fire] and told him to come forward on to the floor and pit himself against Loki. Then a trough filled with meat was brought in and set on the hall floor. Loki placed himself at one end and Logi at the other. Each began to eat as fast as he could, and they met in the middle of the trough. Loki had eaten all the meat from the bones, but Logi had eaten not only the meat but also the bones and even the trough. To everyone it seemed that Loki had lost the contest.

'Then Utgarda Loki asked in what the youngster could compete. Thjalfi replied that he would run a race against whomever Utgarda Loki chose. Utgarda Loki called that a fine sport, but said that Thjalfi would have to be very quick if he intended to win. Utgarda Loki made it clear that the matter would quickly be put to the test. Next Utgarda Loki stood up and went outside where there was a good running course over the flat plain. He called a little fellow named Hugi to come to him and ordered him to run a race with Thjalfi. They ran the first race, and Hugi was so far in the lead that he turned around at the end and faced his opponent.

'Then Utgarda-Loki said, "Thjalfi, you will need to exert yourself more if you are to win the contest. Yet it is true that no one else has come here who seemed to me faster on his feet than you."

'Then they began to race for a second time. When Hugi came to the end of the course he turned around, but Thjalfi was behind him by the distance of a long bow shot.

'Utgarda Loki then said: "I think Thjalfi knows how to run a good race, but I have no faith that he will win. Now comes the test, let them run the third race." When Hugi reached the end of the race and turned around, Thjalfi had not even reached the midpoint of the course. Everyone then said that the contest was over.

'Utgarda Loki asked Thor what feat he wanted to show them, as so many tales were told about his exploits. Thor answered that he would most like to pit himself against someone in drinking. Utgarda-Loki said that this contest could easily be arranged. He went into the hall and called to his cupbearer, telling him to bring the feasting horn from which his retainers usually drank. The cupbearer quickly brought the horn and placed it in Thor's hand.

'Then Utgarda Loki said, "It is thought that drinking from this horn is well done if it is emptied in one drink. Some drain it in two, but no one is such a small-time drinker that he cannot finish it in three."

'Thor eyed the horn, and it did not seem to be very large, although it was rather long. He was quite thirsty and began to drink, swallowing hugely and thinking that it would not be necessary to bend himself over the horn more than once. When he had drunk as much as he could, he bent back from the horn and looked in to see how much drink remained. It seemed to him that the level in the horn was only slightly lower than it had been before.

'Utgarda-Loki then said, "Good drinking, although not all that much. I would not have believed it if I had been told that Thor of the Æsir would not have drunk more, but I know that you will drain it in a second drink."

'Thor gave no reply but put the horn to his mouth and resolved to take a larger drink. He struggled with it as long as he could hold his breath and noticed that he could not lift up the bottom end of the horn as much as he would have liked. When he lowered the horn from his mouth and looked in, it seemed to him that the level had gone down even less than it had in the first try, although there was now enough space at the top of the horn above the liquid to carry the drink without spilling it.

'Utgarda Loki asked, "What now, Thor? Are you going to be so brave that you will take one sip more than is good for you? It seems to me that if you want to take a third drink from the horn, then it will have to be the biggest. But among us here, you will not be known as great a man as the Æsir call you, unless you give a better account of yourself in other contests than it seems to me you are doing in this one."

'Then Thor grew angry. Placing the horn to his mouth, he drank with all his might, continuing as long as he could. When he looked into the horn he could see at least some difference. Then he gave the horn back and would drink no more.

'Utgarda Loki said, "Clearly your strength is not as great as we thought, but will you still try your hand in other contests? It is obvious that you are not going to succeed here."

'Thor replied: "I will make a try at still another game. But when I was home among the Æsir, I would have found it strange if such drinks were called little. What sort of contest will you offer me now?"

'Utgarda-Loki replied, "Here among us, little boys do something that is thought a rather small matter: they lift my cat off the ground. But I would not have thought it possible to propose such a thing to Thor of the Æsir if I had not already seen that your strength is much less than I had thought."

'Now a grey cat, and rather a large one, jumped out on to the floor of the hall. Thor approached it, and, placing his hand under the middle of the belly, started to lift up the cat. But as much as Thor raised his hand the cat arched its back. When Thor had reached as high as he could, one of the cat's paws was lifted off the ground. Beyond this effort, Thor could do no more.

'Then Utgarda-Loki said, "This contest has gone as I expected it would. The cat is rather large, whereas Thor is short and small compared with the larger men among us here."

'Thor replied, "Although you call me little, let someone come forward and wrestle with me! Now I am angry!"

'Utgarda-Loki looked over the benches and replied, "Here inside, I do not see any man who would find it dignified to wrestle with you." Then he went on, "But wait, first let us see. Call my nurse, the old woman Elli, to come here, and let Thor wrestle with her, if he wants to. She has thrown to the ground men who seemed to me to be no less strong than Thor."

'Next an old woman walked into the hall. Utgarda-Loki said she should wrestle with Thor of the Æsir. The story is not long to tell. The match went this way: the more Thor threw his strength into the grappling, the more steadfastly she stood her ground. Then the old crone showed her skill. Thor lost his footing and the contest grew fiercer. It was not long before Thor fell to one knee. Then Utgarda Loki intervened. He told them to stop the contest, saying that there was no need for Thor to challenge others to wrestle in his hall. By then it was late at night. Utgarda-Loki showed Thor and his companions to places on the benches, and there they were treated well for the rest of the night.

Utgarda Loki Reveals that Thor was Deceived

'In the morning, at first light, Thor and his companions stood up, dressed and prepared to leave. Utgarda-Loki then came in and had a table set for them. There was no lack of hospitality as to food or drink. When they finished eating they turned to leave. Utgarda Loki stayed with them, accompanying them as they left the fortress. At their parting, Utgarda-Loki asked Thor how he thought the trip had gone and whether Thor had ever met a man more powerful. Thor replied that he could not deny that he had been seriously dishonoured in their encounter. "Moreover, I know that you will say that I am a person of little account and that galls me."

'And Utgarda-Loki replied, "Now that you are out of the fortress, I will tell you the truth, for, if I live and am

the one to decide, you will never enter it again. On my word, I can assure you, that you would never have been allowed to enter if I had known in advance that you had so much power in you, because you nearly brought disaster upon us. I have tricked you with magical shape-changings, as I did that first time when I found you in the forest. I am the one you met there. And when you tried to untie the food bag, you were unable to find where to undo it, because I had fastened it with iron wire. When you next struck me three times with the hammer, the first was the least, yet it was so powerful that it would have killed me had it found its mark. But when you saw a flat-topped mountain near my hall with three square-shaped valleys in it, one deeper than the others, these were the marks of your hammer I had moved this flat-topped mountain in front of your blows, but you did not see me doing it. It was the same when your companions contested with my retainers. And so it was in the first contest undertaken by Loki. He was very hungry and he ate quickly But the one called Logi was wildfire itself, and he burned the trough no less quickly than the meat. When Thjalfi ran against the one called Hugi, that was my mind, and Thjalfi could not be ex pected to compete with its speed. When you drank from the horn, you thought it slow going, but on my word that was à miracle I would never have believed could happen. The other end of the horn, which you could not see, was out in the ocean. When you come to the ocean you will see how much your drinking lowered it. This is now known as the tides."

'Utgarda Loki had still more to say. "I thought it no

less a feat when you lifted the cat. Truly all those who saw you raise one of the cat's paws off the ground grew fearful, because that cat was not what it seemed to be. It was the Midgard Serpent, which encircles all lands, and from head to tail its length is just enough to round the earth. But you pulled him up so high that he almost reached the sky.

'"It, too, was a real wonder that you remained on your feet for so long during the wrestling. You fell no more than on to one knee, as you struggled with the crone Elli [Old Age], and no one accomplishes that after reaching the point where old age beckons, because no one overcomes Old Age. As we part, I can truthfully say that it would be better for us both if you never come again to meet me. Next time I will defend my stronghold with similar or other trickery, so that you will not get me into your power."

'When Thor heard this account, he gripped his hammer and raised it into the air. But, when he was ready to strike, Utgarda Loki was nowhere to be seen. Then Thor returned to the fortress, intending to destroy it. There he saw a broad, beautiful plain, but no stronghold. Then, turning back, he journeyed until he came once again to Thrudvangar. In truth, it can be said that from then on he was determined to find a way to confront the Midgard Serpent, and later on that happened.

'Now I believe that no one else could have given you a truer account of this journey by Thor.'

Thor and the Giant Hymir Go Fishing

Gangleri then said: 'Utgarda-Loki is very powerful, and he uses many tricks and much magic. Nevertheless, it is evident that he is a force to be reckoned with, because his retainers have so much strength. But didn't Thor take vengeance in return?'

High answered, 'Even those who are not men of learning know that Thor made amends for the journey just recounted. He was not home for long before he prepared to set out again. He went so quickly that he took with him neither chariot nor goats nor companions. Leaving Midgard disguised as a young boy, he arrived one evening at the house of a giant, the one called Hymir. Thor stayed there that night. At daybreak Hymir got up, dressed and prepared to go fishing in the sea. Thor jumped up, quickly got himself ready and asked Hymir to let him row out to sea with him. But Hymir said he could expect little help from the boy, because he was so young and so small. "And you will freeze if you stay as long and as far out as I am accustomed to doing."

'Thor told Hymir that he would not stop him from rowing far out from land, and he added that it was not clear who would be the first one wanting to row back in. Thor grew so enraged at the giant that he almost let the hammer slam into him. Yet he let the matter pass because he had set his mind on testing his strength elsewhere. He asked Hymir what sort of bait they should use, but Hymir told him to get his own. Thor then went

off looking until he saw a herd of oxen belonging to Hymir. He took the biggest ox, called Himinhrjot, ripped off its head, and took it with him down to the sea.

'Hymir had already launched the boat. Thor got in and sat down towards the stern. He took two oars and started rowing, and Hymir noticed that he was making some progress. Hymir rowed from forward in the bow, and the boat moved quickly. Hymir then said that they had come to the waters where he usually trawled for flatfish, but Thor said he wanted to row much further, and they started another bout of fast rowing. Hymir then warned that they had come so far out that to go further was dangerous because of the Midgard Serpent. But Thor replied that he wanted to keep on rowing, and so he did. Hymir was by then most unhappy.

'Finally Thor pulled up his oars and set about preparing his line, which was very strong, with a hook that was neither weaker nor less firm. Thor baited the hook with the ox head and cast it overboard, where it sank to the bottom. And it can be said in truth that this time Thor tricked the Midgard Serpent no less than Utgarda Loki had tricked Thor into lifting the Midgard Serpent with his arm.

'The Midgard Serpent opened its mouth and swallowed the ox head. The hook dug into the gums of its mouth, and when the serpent felt this, he snapped back so hard that both of Thor's fists slammed against the gunwale. Thor now became angry and, taking on his divine strength, he strained so hard that both his feet pushed through the bottom of the boat. Using the sea floor to brace himself, he began pulling the serpent up on board.

It can be said that no one has seen a more terrifying sight than this: Thor, narrowing his eyes at the serpent, while the serpent spits out poison and stares straight back from below. It is told that the giant Hymir changed colour He grew pale and feared for his life when he saw the serpent and also the sea rushing in and out of the boat.

'Just at that instant, as Thor grabbed the hammer and raised it into the air, the giant, fumbling with the bait knife, cut Thor's line where it lay across the edge of the boat, and the serpent sank back into the sea. But Thor threw his hammer after it, and people say that down on the bottom he struck the serpent's head off But I think the opposite is true: the Midgard Serpent still lives and lies in the surrounding sea. Using his fist, Thor punched Hymir behind the ear so that he fell head over heels overboard With this Thor waded back to land.'

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The High One Reveals the Events of Ragnarok

Then Gangleri asked, 'What is to be said about Ragnarok? I have not heard it spoken of before.'

High replied: 'There are many important things to be said about it First will come the winter called Fimbulvetr [Extreme Winter]. Snow will drive in from all directions; the cold will be severe and the winds will be fierce. The sun will be of no use. Three of these winters will come, one after the other, with no summer in between But before that there will have been another three winters

with great battles taking place throughout the world. Brothers will kill brothers for the sake of greed, and neither father nor son will be spared in the killings and the collapse of kinship. So it is said in *The Sibyl's Prophecy*:

> Brothers will fight,
> bringing death to each other.
> Sons of sisters
> will split their kin bonds.
> Hard times for men,
> rampant depravity,
> age of axes, age of swords,
> shields split,
> wind age, wolf age,
> until the world falls into ruin

'Next will come an event thought to be of much importance. The wolf will swallow the sun, and mankind will think it has suffered a terrible disaster. Then the other wolf will catch the moon, and he too will cause much ruin. The stars will disappear from the heavens.

'So, also, there is this to be told: the whole earth, together with the mountains, will start to shake so that the trees will loosen from the ground, the mountains will fall, and all fetters and bonds will sever and break. Then the Fenriswolf will break free. The sea will surge on to the land as the Midgard Serpent writhes in giant fury and advances up on the land. Then it also will happen that the ship Naglfar loosens from its moorings. It is made from the nails of dead men, and for this reason it is worth considering the warning that if a person dies

with untrimmed nails he contributes crucial material to Naglfar, a ship that both gods and men would prefer not to see built. On the flooding sea, Naglfar comes floating. The giant steering Naglfar is named Hrym. Meanwhile, the Fenriswolf advances with its mouth gaping: its upper jaw reaches to the heavens and the lower one drops down to the earth. He would open it still wider, if only there were room. Flames shoot out of his eyes and nostrils. The Midgard Serpent spews out so much venom that it spatters throughout the air and into the sea. He is terrible and will be on one side of the wolf.

'Amid this din the sky splits apart and in ride the sons of Muspell. Surt comes first, riding with fires burning both before and behind him. His sword is magnificent, and the glare from it is brighter than that from the sun. As they ride across Bifrost, it will break, as was told earlier. Muspell's sons advance until they reach the plain called Vigrid [Battle Plain]. The Fenriswolf and the Midgard Serpent also go there. Then Loki arrives and also Hrym. The latter is accompanied by all the frost giants, while all of Hel's own follow Loki. The sons of Muspell have their own battle troop, and it shines brilliantly. The field Vigrid lies a hundred leagues in each direction.

'As these events occur, Heimdall stands up and blows the Gjallarhorn with all his strength. He wakens all the gods, who then hold an assembly. Odin now rides to Mimir's Well, seeking Mimir's counsel for both himself and his followers. The ash Yggdrasil shakes, and nothing, whether in heaven or on earth, is without fear.'

'The Æsir and all the Einherjar dress for war and advance on to the field. Odin rides in front of them. He

wears a gold helmet and a magnificent coat of mail, and he carries his spear called Gungnir. He goes against the Fenriswolf with Thor advancing at his side. Thor will be unable to assist Odin, because he will have his hands full fighting the Midgard Serpent. Frey will fight against Surt, and it will be a fierce exchange before Frey falls. His death will come about because he lacks the good sword, the one that he gave to Skirnir. By now the hound Garm, who was bound in front of Gnipahellir, will also have broken free. He, the worst of monsters, will fight against Tyr. They will be each other's death.

'Thor will kill the Midgard Serpent, and then he will step back nine feet. Because of the poison the serpent spits on him, he will fall to the earth, dead. The wolf will swallow Odin, and that will be his death. But immediately afterwards Vidar will stride forward and thrust one of his feet into the lower jaw of the wolf. He wears on that foot the shoe that has been assembled through the ages by collecting the extra pieces that people cut away from the toes and heels when fashioning their shoes. Thus those who want to help the Æsir should throw these extra pieces away. With one hand he takes hold of the wolf's upper jaw and rips apart its mouth, and this will be the wolf's death. Loki will battle with Heimdall, and they will be the death of each other. Next Surt will throw fire over the earth and burn the whole world.'

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The Theft of Idunn and Her Apples

Bragi began his storytelling by saying that three of the Æsir – Odin, Loki and Hoenir – were once travelling from home and crossed mountains and deserts, where they found little food. When coming down into a valley they saw a herd of oxen and, taking one, they began to cook it. When they thought the meat was ready, they broke open the cooking pit, but found the ox was not cooked. A while later, when for the second time they broke open the cooking pit, the meat was still raw. As they began asking each other what could be the cause, they heard a voice coming from above in an oak tree under which they were standing. The one who was sitting up in the tree said that he was causing the food to remain uncooked in the oven. Looking up they saw an eagle sitting there, and it was not small.

The eagle said, 'If you are willing to give me my fill of the ox, the pit will cook.'

They agreed to this. Then the eagle glided down from the tree and landed on the pit. The first thing it did was to eat the ox's two thighs and both of its shoulders. This angered Loki, who picked up a large stick and, swinging with all his might, struck the eagle. Recoiling from the blow the eagle started to fly, but one end of the pole was stuck fast to the eagle's body, with Loki hanging on to the other end.

The eagle flew so low that Loki's feet were dragged on the ground, striking stones, gravel and trees, and he thought his arms would be pulled from their sockets. He

called out, begging the eagle for mercy, but the bird answered that Loki would not be saved unless he swore an oath that he would find a way to lure Idunn, with her apples [of youth], out of Asgard. When Loki agreed, he was set free and returned to his companions. Nothing else is said to have occurred during that trip before they reached home. At the time agreed upon, Loki tricked Idunn into leaving Asgard and going into the forest with him. He told her that he had found apples that she would find to be of great worth and asked her to bring along her apples so that she might compare them. Just then the giant Thjazi arrived in the shape of an eagle and, seizing Idunn, he flew off with her to his home in Thrymheim.

Idunn's disappearance badly affected the Æsir, and they soon began to grow old and grey. The Æsir gathered together in an assembly and asked one another the news of Idunn. They realized that she had last been seen leaving Asgard with Loki. Then Loki was seized and brought to the assembly, where he was threatened with torture or death. When he grew frightened, he said he would go into Giant Land to find Idunn if Freyja would lend him her falcon shape.

Loki Retrieves Idunn from the Giant Thjazi

When Loki got hold of the falcon shape, he flew north into Giant Land. He arrived at Thjazi's on a day when the giant had rowed out to sea, so Idunn was home alone. Loki changed her into the shape of a nut and,

holding her in his claws, flew away as fast as he could. When Thjazi returned home and found Idunn missing, he put on his eagle shape and flew after Loki, the air booming with the sound of the eagle's flight. When the Æsir saw the falcon flying with the nut and the eagle in pursuit, they went outside to the walls of Asgard, carrying piles of wood shavings. As the falcon flew in over the fortress, it dived down alongside the fortress wall, and at that moment the Æsir set fire to the wood shavings. But the eagle, having just missed the falcon, was unable to stop himself before his feathers caught fire, and he fell from the air. The Æsir who were nearby killed the giant Thjazi inside the gate of Asgard, and this slaying is very famous.

Skadi Seeks Vengeance for Her Father

Now Skadi, daughter of the giant Thjazi, put on her helmet and coat of mail and, taking all her weapons of war, set out for Asgard to avenge her father. But the Æsir offered to reconcile and proposed compensation. First she should choose a husband for herself from among the Æsir, but she might choose only from the feet of the man, seeing nothing else. She saw that the feet of one man were especially beautiful and said 'I choose that one; few things on Baldr will be ugly.' But that was Njord from Noatun.

Another condition of her settlement was that the Æsir must do something she thought they could not do: make her laugh. Then Loki tied one end of a cord to the beard

of a goat and tied the other end around his own testicles. The goat and Loki started pulling back and forth, each squealing loudly until finally Loki fell into Skadi's lap, and then she laughed. With this, the Æsir concluded their part of the settlement with her.

It is said that Odin, to compensate her further, took Thjazi's eyes and cast them up into the heavens, where he made from them two stars.

The Inheritance of the Giants

Then Ægir said, 'Thjazi seems to me to have been exceptionally powerful, but what are his origins?'

Bragi answered, 'Olvaldi was the name of Thjazi's father, and if I were to tell you about him, you would find it a remarkable story. He had great wealth in gold, and when he died his sons were to divide the inheritance. In dividing the gold, they measured their shares by each taking the same number of mouthfuls in turn. One of them was Thjazi, the second Idi, and the third was Gang. From this story comes the expression whereby gold is referred to as the mouth count of these giants. We conceal this reference to gold in cryptic speech or poetic allusions by referring to it as the speech or the words or the count of these giants.'

Then Ægir said, 'It seems to me that this story is well hidden in secret lore.'


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KQ-674-796

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